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A SCHOLAR'S LETTERS FROM THE FRONT

Walter L. Cobb. Sc.

Stephen Hewett.
1910.

Walter L. Tolle, Jr.

Stephen Hewett.
1910.

A SCHOLAR'S LETTERS FROM THE FRONT

WRITTEN BY

STEPHEN H. HEWETT

2ND LIEUT. IN THE ROYAL WARWICKSHIRE REGIMENT

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

F. F. URQUHART

FELLOW OF BALLIOL COLLEGE, OXFORD

WITH PORTRAIT

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.

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TO

DOM LEANDER RAMSAY

HEADMASTER OF DOWNSIDE SCHOOL

1902-1918

"HIS HEADMASTER STILL"

INTRODUCTION

MANY soldiers' letters have been published during the past three years, and with reason, for we should keep what record we can of a generation so gallant and so sorely stricken. Yet a few words of explanation are perhaps due, when an addition is made to the number of such publications. Englishmen are proverbially reticent in expression, especially when they feel deeply, and the letters of English soldiers have been distinguished on the whole by this reserve. They contain, often enough, vivid pictures of things done or suffered, of the daily routine or the occasional adventure, but they are rarely meditative, they rarely reveal the thoughts or emotions of the writer, and we must go to their verses to find what our soldiers *feel* about the war. There is therefore good reason for publishing some of the letters of a young Oxford scholar to whom the war was a searching experience but who took it with a cheerful heart, one who from boyhood had sought the art of expression and for whom a thought was not mature until it had received adequate utterance.

Stephen Hewett was born in India in 1893. His father was in the Indian telegraph service, a career which in the wilder parts of the country had often meant danger and adventure. On Mr. Hewett's

retirement from the service the family came to live in Exeter, and Stephen was sent to Downside in 1905. He remained there till midsummer 1911. The school lies on the northern slopes of the Mendips, in an open, windy country of grass and trees, of distant views and unexpected valleys. It is under the care of Benedictine monks and no boy of any sensitiveness could fail to be influenced, however unconsciously, by the orderly carrying out of the Catholic liturgy in a church worthy of it, while the trials of school life are softened by the share which the boys have in the peace and sympathy of the Benedictine family. As a boy Stephen Hewett was very reserved, not making friends easily, and very diffident of his powers. Yet his capacity was undoubted from the first. He read widely, thoughtfully and with intense appreciation. With this power of assimilation he combined a very mature taste and a delight in the music and meaning of single lines, of phrases which seemed to him the perfect expression of a thought or an emotion. He went up for the Balliol Scholarship Examination at the age of sixteen and won an Exhibition. He went up again in the following year, 1910, and was elected to the first scholarship. But he was far from being only a scholar. He was a good cricketer with some excellent strokes, which are still remembered in the school, and in his last year he was captain of the XI. He played also in the football and hockey teams. That great period in a boy's life, his last year at school, he enjoyed to the full. In the secure possession of a scholarship and under sympathetic guidance he could read what he wished; while with success and maturer years there came greater self-confidence. Shy, hitherto, and

amusingly old-fashioned and deferential in manner, he came to revel in talk with a few friends, especially with those older than himself. In public he was still diffident, and this although he was captain of the school and could play with success the part of the Duke in the " Gondoliers."

Stephen Hewett's devotion to Downside never wavered even for a moment during the five years that he had yet to live, as indeed his letters will show. He loved its fine bracing air, its spacious views—that, for instance, from Masbury Camp towards Glastonbury Tor across to the distant Quantocks—for he was a passionate Wordsworthian, and the hills and fields and trees, especially the hills, gave him such delight that he was not merely using a strong expression when he spoke of being " maddened " by a view. During these years the passage that he quotes most frequently was a line from Victor Hugo,

> Le vent qui vient à travers la montagne
> Me rendra fou.

In the little world of Downside he had a number of friends, both among the lay masters and among the monks, while his receptive nature, sensitive to every impression, found support in a society which is set in due order and reason, as little of the world outside is nowadays, where God is the public and acknowledged sovereign of daily life, and where religion is not an occasional duty but a constant inspiration. If he had lived through the war he would almost certainly have returned to join the Downside monks, and he always considered that his future profession was to be that of a teacher.

It would be difficult to imagine a boy more likely to enjoy Oxford. His scholarly instincts and wide reading, his interests in questions of art and literature, his craving for friendship and for friendly talks on all the subjects that were so alive to him, they would all find a response in Oxford. His diffidence, it is true, was against him, and when he came to Balliol in October, 1911, it was some little time before he found his level. Indeed, he always disliked any kind of public appearance, and he never was what is called a "leading man in college." In some things he was unable to overcome his old nervousness : though quite a success at cricket he gave up the game because he found that the prospect even of a college match made him too excited to do his work. Hockey he played with much more confidence, and so well that he got into the University team and distinguished himself in the match against Cambridge in 1914. Much, however, as he enjoyed his hockey, Stephen Hewett's real interests were naturally elsewhere. They were, for one thing, with his work as a scholar, in which he was uniformly successful, winning all the possible University scholarships, the Craven, the Hertford, and the Ireland : and he had indeed a constant delight in the great classics. His vacation rambles and visits to Italy or the Alps were sources of intense pleasure, but he always returned with renewed affection to the Haldons, the hills near his home "where one can lie on the hills in absolute quiet and watch the sea." His home and his family were never far from his thoughts. But most of all he delighted at Oxford in the society of his friends, young men with whom he would discuss his and their thoughts about art, literature and the thousand and one things which crowd into the mind of a

young man so gifted. Before he went to Oxford he was afraid of its "pleasures," and in one of these letters looking back to his Balliol days he writes of "the lotus-eating element that was too much for us in the Oxford days." But in this he was probably over-severe with himself. His time at the University was well employed. His ideal of work was a high one and he had repeatedly, for reasons of health, to allow himself periods of comparative rest. That he enjoyed his life so intensely was not due to self-indulgence, it was simply the result of his natural power of enjoying the best things. For Stephen Hewett's greatest gift, as we knew him, was this extraordinary capacity for appreciation. A University atmosphere is naturally, perhaps, critical, but Stephen's power was one of *praise*, not, of course, the mere praise of the lips, but the praise of intense enjoyment and gratitude. Nature, the books he read, in all their varied kinds, his friends, they were all a source of constant delight. So receptive was his mind, so appreciative, that his friends may have asked themselves whether he was not wanting in speculative and critical power, in originality. Those who worked with him knew that this was not the case, and one of his tutors writes of his work as a classical scholar: "In all that he wrote, and especially in his essays, nothing was more remarkable than the degree to which his work was his own. He read books about the Classics, of course, but he rarely, if ever, repeated any judgment about Ancient Literature or Art unless he had understood it and accepted it as his own. His own judgments were formed with unusual care and conscientiousness, and in consequence of this, and of his natural gifts of insight and appreciation, they were

often much truer and deeper than those which are to be found, oft-repeated, in books. His style also was careful, without being in any way affected; he had a real genius for expression at once adequate and impressive, and often humorous; and any class of which he was a member must have learned, consciously and unconsciously, much more from him than from its nominal teacher. Certainly it is unusual for an essay class to show real disappointment at the absence of one of their number who is in the habit of writing at considerable length; and such disappointment was both felt and expressed when circumstances kept him away. His reading of his essays was worthy of their matter—unaffected, but expressive and musical, and very good to listen to. In the more technical parts of his work—in composition and translation—he showed great cleverness as well as the fine taste and the singular maturity which were characteristic of his essays. He rarely, if ever, wrote Latin or Greek which was 'in no particular style,' and many of his compositions could be published as models with scarcely a word altered." Criticism, indeed, or at least selection, he had practised instinctively from early days in his exclusion of what was sordid or evil, and literary discussion came to take a great part in his talk and letters; his "Greats" work during his last year at Oxford showed that he had real philosophical capacity, though it was perhaps in speculation about art, in the widest sense of the term, that he took most personal interest. He once summarised his practical philosophy in a letter written in less happy days to one of his sisters: "Never let your memories be spoilt by 'pain.' The joys of memory are certain and inalienable which 'no

man shall take from you.' They go at once to join the number of things which are flawlessly delightful in the region where *art* lives. Outside that region nothing is of value except *friendships* externally and *character* within. Not circumstance: that counts for nothing. . . . This is the lesson I have set myself to learn."

In spite of his successes academic and athletic, in spite of his many interests, Stephen Hewett remained essentially a "scholar," hating public displays, diffident still in manner, not externally brilliant or impressive. It was with friends or in small debating societies that he was in his happiest moods; it was then that he could talk his best, full of the charm of literary allusion ever so modestly suggested, full too of the childish humour which is such a delight in the intercourse of friends. Music—the best music—he had been fond of from his school-days and he was a capable and devoted member of the Bach choir. He was a "scholar" too in the practical things of life. In spite of his love of the open air he was careless of things so utilitarian as landmarks, and had a surprising capacity for losing his way, and indeed for losing his luggage and many other things. He was very easily made anxious and nervous by the unexpected incidents of daily life. Fully conscious of this weakness he felt later that self-confidence in practical things was one of the advantages which he had gained from a soldier's life.

It was this Oxford life that the war changed into the memory of a happier time. Stephen Hewett was twenty-one; he had just finished his third year at the University and that wonderful last summer term, a term which is for so many young men the end of the old world. The outbreak of war found him in Savoy,

waiting for a number of his friends to collect there, looking forward to a pleasant month in the mountains and enjoying already

"Le vent qui vient à travers la montagne."

He was able by personal experience to realise immediately something of the tragedy of the war, for with a friend he had to make his way home during the period of French mobilisation. They left St. Gervais one glorious summer afternoon with the village bells ringing the tocsin and the women crying at their doors. The journey home lasted a week, and most of the time was spent in Paris in real hardship. Everything in those days of confusion seemed uncertain and Stephen and his friend in their anxiety sometimes thought they would actually be cut off in France. "Now that it is all over," he wrote to a friend a fortnight after his return, "I feel that I would not have missed it for anything. I know it has done me the world of good, to learn what hunger and poverty is, and to have seen the spirit with which the French people are going to war. Indeed I cannot resist the temptation of quoting from a sermon about the 17th Century ancestors of Downside: 'Then, when the weary vigil is over, and the light breaks over the sea, one by one, and *two by two*, they will come back again to set their foot on England's shore, better men and stronger, since long schooled by bitter adversity.'"

A scholar is always something of a cosmopolitan, something at least of a "European," and Stephen's first thought about the war seems to have been one of shame—shame that Europe should have to plunge into this abyss of sorrow, pain, and destruction. But

he never doubted the necessity of the war for England, nor that it should prove a purgation. "It is a privilege," he wrote, "which one fully recognises, to be living in such an age. There is a sense of righteousness about it all, and what has happened will no doubt be good for England and the world in general, as it certainly is for many an individual." From the first he was anxious to "join up," as his friends were doing, but he was kept by the thought of his mother's dependence on him, and he returned to a very troubled October term at Oxford. Before the end of December, however, these financial difficulties were overcome and he applied for a commission. He was longing for military service, though, with his anxious temperament, he dreaded it. "I am so pleased to have the commission; to be sure at least of the ground I stand on, though it be burning marl." The commission was in the 11th Warwicks. It was over a year before he went out to France and it was a very hard year for him. The monotony of parades weighed heavily enough on his spirits at times, but what he found most difficult to face was the absence of "camaraderie," the atmosphere of continual "strafe" which is common enough in the army and which a less sensitive man would have taken in the day's work. But Stephen, when at school, had once written that his definition of earthly happiness was to be kindly treated, and Oxford had probably increased his dependence on the friendliness of those about him. He enjoyed, on the other hand, his work with the men under him. With changes of battalion, changes of place, constant anxiety to get to the Front, the year 1915 dragged on. The last months were passed under pleasanter conditions at Blandford,

and it was a great relief when he discovered that he had been purposely kept back because he was of use in training the men. At last the summons came, and early in February, 1916, he left for France. From that date his letters tell their own story. It is on the whole a happy story, for he found again at the Front the friendliness which meant so much to him, and he took his full share in those high enthusiasms and that splendid confidence which inspired the Army of the Somme. The country they conquered so laboriously, so gallantly, but at so heavy a price was, alas, lost again and had to be reconquered, but courage, enthusiasm, self-sacrifice, these things can never be lost, and Stephen's prayer in the last of these letters has surely been heard: "Suscipiat Dominus sacrificium nostrum."

The 14th Warwicks were not engaged in the earlier part of the Somme advance, but on July 22nd he led his platoon in an attack and never returned. His name appeared among the "missing," but enquiries among men who had been with him and come up after him made it clear, after a while, that he had fallen somewhere between High Wood and Delville Wood. His company commander, Captain Bryson, whom he liked and admired so much, and who fell himself not long after, had meanwhile written home and gave the news that he was missing. "I am lucky enough to have been his Company Commander and am very proud to count myself among his friends. He was a fine officer in every way, loved and respected by his men and an irreparable loss to the company and the regiment. . . . He and his men never flinched for a moment and worthily upheld the traditions of the regiment and, of course, of Oxford men. Things are very different

without Stephen Hewett. He and I had many talks and did most things together. We had a certain amount in common as I was a fresher at Oriel until the war started, but of course being but a Pass Mods. man and no athlete I had nothing but admiration for his brains and achievements at games."

The letters which have been collected in this volume were nearly all of them written from the Front. A few earlier ones have been included because they help to give an idea of Stephen Hewett's character and interests. The letters are addressed to his mother and two sisters, the elder of whom is a nun, to Mr. and Mrs. Robertson, very good friends of his, and to some of those with whom he had lived so intimately at Downside and Oxford. Of the letters to his mother the longer form what he called his "Diary": they were meant to be circulated among a few of his friends. They may strike some readers as being too formed in style to be good letters; but in a sense they are characteristic of the writer. There was always an old-fashioned manner, a *gravitas*, about Stephen, even in his lightest moments, which would never allow him to say or write what was slip-shod or over-familiar. It should be added that none of these letters have been "edited." Passages have been, for one reason or another, left out but, except for two or three names, not a word has been changed. They are printed as they are found in his grave and beautiful handwriting.

Saturday was even finer, and I had 9 hours at Chartres. For Chartres - as Belloc says of the N. Pollard - consult the Guide Books! But, enthusiasm apart, I've never seen anything like Chartres Cathedral: I say no more, - except that I also enjoyed there a quite irreproachable lunch in a small and dingy Pub. I went up the Clocher, solus, with a young Frenchman, with whom I spent nearly an hour discussing Religion in England & France, and J.K. Huysmanns Can you imagine me? - He congratulated me on my efforts all the same; and later on in the evening I scored a great success with a mildly huffy and very cheerful French Sailor.

From a letter written in August, 1913.

The letters printed in this book are nearly all in pencil, and cannot be properly reproduced.

A SCHOLAR'S LETTERS FROM THE FRONT

To his Mother

No. 8 Camp,
Windmill Hill.

. . . Certainly it was a dreamlike experience to be transported, beyond my wildest hopes, to Oxford, and there to remain for three times as long as I had expected. There was something more than ordinary this year even in the beauty of Eights-Week time. And what friends did I not see, so unexpectedly! . . .

So you see it was all very jolly, and just as one might have prayed for in a most audacious fit of optimism! It did me good—to have a complete rest, where the wicked cease from troubling, and to see my friends and my intellectual home. I have been to Downside at Easter, to Oxford at the end of May, and have seen you welcomed in the house of my kindest friends.

Of course the leaving Oxford made me sad and angry. But I came back here to find that my company commander had genuinely missed me, and that my fellow-officers were genuinely glad to see me back. Also my work is full of little human problems, which are full of

worry and of interest. They are things to occupy the mind fully, and are a fine training for the work which I hope I may be spared to do. Really—if I had one or two more qualities—I should be quite good at this game. But I shall never get all those qualities until I get over certain repugnancies in the work, which I fear are insuperable. . . ."

To Mrs. Robertson

Windmill Hill,
June 12, 15.

I am very much interested in the work of my platoon —continually bored by details, but enthusiastic in general—and the problems connected with it are at once fascinating and full of worry. I came back to find the men in a grumbling mood after 14 days very hard work (the Brigade Training), which I am sorry I was hindered from sharing with them: I fear I shall have to have a little trouble with them. The running of the Battalion, as I see it done, and the running of my own platoon, are of great interest to me in the light of my ambitions—to teach a class well, and in general to organise a school in the best way yet known (!) I hope I shall survive to put my hand to some such work. And I can't help feeling this comfort in the bothers of the life here—that this life as a Platoon Commander in "B" Company is precisely what I prayed for, as a stiffening influence to my worldly character, and a chastening to my spiritual. If only I can make myself "take it like a man." And it grows easier by trying. I feel a little more like a man.

Besides people here are my friends, and—as the Irish Players say " don't mind me at all."

I carry away from Oxford memories full of the scent of summer and the colours of the May blossoms—never yet seen so beautiful. Apsley was a vision. Nor do I think I have ever enjoyed the outward air of my college—the quad, my old rooms and all—so much; or—what is far more important—felt so much the living presence of the great men, our fathers before us, as I passed of a sudden under a cool arch into the full blaze of that garden quad " where in a very special sense you are in Oxford." . . . So I pray that you may be at Apsley when I visit you again, as I confidently hope I shall before we go away—they do say to the Dardanelles.

To Mrs. Robertson

Swanage,
Oct. 18, '15.

Really, in this military life, or perhaps I should say for *everybody* in this time of war, one is made to lose that old dependence upon what seemed the greatest element of happiness,—the sense of permanence and stability and a singleness of aims in one's work and movements,—to grow old at one occupation, among familiar faces. And no doubt one is the worse for losing that sense. But now one must grow coarser, or at all events harder. We live in vicissitudes. For the peace of the single and stable life, we have the excitements of perpetual surprise and change; for friendships, we have the rough-and-ready fellowships

of men who are united to one only by the chances of one's work, here to-day and gone the next; for ambition and self-realisation, we have to learn a cheerful adaptability and patient submission. The old Eleventh are now to me a sort of "Army of a dream"; even those who came here with me have been—some of them at least—sent to other camps; and our doings at Windmill Hill are no more than "far-off things, and battles long ago." I get no news from the Eleventh; and, writing seldom to my older friends, I hear little of their doings. . . .

—So that, when everything changes around one, there is perhaps some excuse for changes in one's own mood. I am now quite happy—not that I have really lost my ambitions—perhaps only as the result of the signalling course with its healthy activities (in examinations so far I have scored 98, 98, 93 and 99 %, not bad for a mere Balliol man!) and of a sudden burst of energy in the Battalion which has led to the playing of several football matches. Yesterday I played for the Battalion at half-back in a tremendous match against the 13th Worcesters, and did not do at all badly for one who gave up football when he left school, and has never played half-back since he was nine. By the way, on Wednesday we are all packing up and leaving Swanage for a camp some three or four miles out of *Blandford*. There I believe we shall get some *hockey*. Ah! . . .

Yes, I don't know why I should be ashamed of my undistinguished leisure when I sit with my old pipe alight, the proud possessor of a few square feet in a dormitory-hut *and* of all the obvious memories and interests of my most happy past, a kind of shareholder

in the joys of this fine Dorsetshire country, and by this time the inheritor of a sort of Stoic indifference. And at last I have learnt by the addition of this experience to my experiences in the Eleventh that it is a great sin and a foolishness as well, to be dissatisfied with *any* lot of one's fellow beings into whose company chance may throw one. There are good fellows here, and many of them. I am closely bound up with "No. I. Camp" in a very sincere though only temporary and quite unsentimental fellowship. And I have learnt that there is nothing quite like the rough-and-ready, careless humour and bonhomie, the Messings and the Marches and the Bugle-calls and the Men of the army, at any rate at home: and that there is certainly nothing at this time so inspiring as the hopes which an officer has, however long he may be made to wait.

To Mrs. Robertson

Downside,
Dec. 18, '15.

We had a Mass for our dead in the war. The bier was not in the choir but in amid the benches where the school sits; it was not draped in black or purple, but in red, white, and blue. I am sure we have all of us never felt more in earnest about what we sang —"dona eis requiem"—for souls that remain in our thoughts as too young, or too cheerful, or too promising, or too gentle and generous, to be associated with the cruel circumstances of death. The ceremony ended when our Headmaster—"their Headmaster" still—sprinkled the bier: "dixitque novissima verba."

It was a strengthening experience, and made us even happy—because it expressed for us what our hearts wanted to say.

To Cyril Bailey

Blandford,
30 . 12 . 15.

Thank you for writing me a real letter in return for my 'postal communication.' I must resist the desire to start talking about myself—for I hope now soon to be able to express what I feel in actions, which I hope will supply the matter for many more letters to you—and the desire to follow out some of the more serious lines you started: but I really must take up one of the things you said. It is more pleasant to me than you can think to hear that you would like a visit with me to Downside: *fiat, fiat*! Let that stand at the head of our post-war agenda, amid the joy of visits to the Chalet,[1] to Tryfan and the Carneddi, to Chartres, to Porlock, and where not?—just a little pause before we start *work* again after this very long Vacation of War, where only the lucky get the alphas. When I say that Downside is more my home even than Balliol, you at least will not misunderstand me, nor will you fail to see how much I mean by that. Nonsense apart, those who really have the love of the place live there always in the atmosphere of unity and completeness and satisfaction which one is supposed to get only in a picture or a 'poetic experience.' Even the country

[1] "The Chalet" often referred to in these letters is a house in Savoy, on the Prarion, a low spur of Mont Blanc, where reading parties used to foregather in the Long Vacation.

where Downside is has quite a peculiar harmony with the spirit of the place: or perhaps the genius of the place is Downside itself, for those who feel it,—for not everybody gets very excited about the Mendips. I once wrote a poem which meant to be a kind of Guide-book to the 'genius loci': but I have learnt by now that these things are *οὐ τιμώμενα λόγοισιν ἀλλὰ τῇ ξυνουσίᾳ πλέον*. I say all this after thirty and more visits to the place since I went up to Oxford, and I say it in this curious way though I have 'earned a year's stipendium,' and have learnt not to cherish illusions of sentiment, in the Army!

I think that you would have found in Ward's Life of Newman a more normal and more pleasing picture of Catholicism. If Newman repels you, I should like to have a long argument on the subject. As for the Jesuits, well the Army too is "a system squashing individuality" and (though the parallel may not be quite exact) that is not a fatal objection to the Army. We knew what *we* were in for, and so did Father Tyrrell. The monastic system is traditionally a "militia," and as a system it has stood the test of practice and of time, as being—in our point of view—a means of keeping up things which we regard as as much incumbent on our honour as the defence of all that is English against all that is German. Therefore a military discipline—but also a voluntary system, and a very careful system of medical tests and recruit-training, so to speak. And from what I can judge, poor Father Tyrrell was an abnormal recruit, who ought to have been rejected, and was rightly discharged—though it was an unhappy thing—as 'unlikely to make an efficient soldier.'

Downside is quite a good school, as the external

tests go, and the physical and athletic things of a very high standard. But most of all it has shown the power of creating a special type of character in the boys which goes on maturing for some years after they leave: a type as marked as that of Winchester or Repton or any other place. The two men whom I used to quote in illustration are both killed 'au champ d'honneur': Frank Tyrrell was one. This is the expression of a system which, unlike other Catholic systems, is wholly English—the training of gentlemen by gentlemen, but in an atmosphere and circumstances which can never be quite like those of any other school: real 'templa serena.' People would not find Catholics so disappointing if they knew Downside.

To F. F. Urquhart

Blandford,
Jan. 28th, '16.

I am wondering whether you sent that book before you got my card: surely you did, and what a beautiful coincidence it was! I get a rough idea what books come out worth reading, and I knew at once that this was a real pattern of a book: but the realisation is far better than the hope, and I do say that it is so good that it could not be better. Of course I could have made an Anthology as good myself, had I the time and the will, and so could many people: but no one could get nearer to the ideal than Bridges has done; and the get-up of the book is worthy of the matter. There is only one (curious) oversight—the great treasury of *Newman's* work. Since my leave

last month, a lengthy leave, I have taken a most firm devotion to that 'grandis senex': three weeks at Downside, even after months of rather deadening influences, served to wake up enthusiasms and convictions which I was rather blind to at Oxford. I wish I had my time there over again: but this experience of the War is a good corrective of the lotus-eating element that was too much for one in Oxford life, and has at least hurried over for me the parting which would have been so painful in the natural way of things. Ah, I do want a few more years in which to do (1) the things which I was preparing for at Oxford, and (2) the things which I left undone.

And thank you for Siordet's poem.[1] Of course he only feels what we all feel: but he writes in a noble simplicity which I at least could have wished to achieve in my only effort to express myself. I am determined to write to him. For three hours yesterday, while the Company were filling their "palliasses," I tried to turn the poem into Greek and Latin verses. It has itself a classical form.

To F. F. Urquhart

Blandford,
Jan. 30, '16

Perhaps my first enthusiasm for Bridges' Anthology needs toning down; though it *is* excellent. After

[1] "To the Dead," by G. C. Siordet. It was printed in the *Times* on Nov. 30th, 1915, with the signature "Gerald Caldwell," and reprinted in "A Crown of Amaranth" (published by Erskine Macdonald, revised edition 1917). Gerald Siordet was killed in action in Mesopotamia in Feb. 1917.

all, you cannot make a perfect Anthology of "The Spirit of Man" without drawing upon Greek and Latin in the originals—Pindar, Sophocles, Lucretius: Homer he has not made the most of, and Virgil he has spoilt by his own uncouth versions (how *could* they have been made by the writer of "There is a stream . . ."?): and I suppose there are things in Dante and Goethe better than the extracts of his Oriental Mystics. However *it is the book I shall take "out there"*—"The Spirit of Man" and the Operas of W. S. Gilbert. So thank you yet again.

At the moment I am strangely satisfied—with high windy downs, energetic football, short hours, no worries, a decent chance of the Front before long, quite fine country, the newly-tried exhilarations of riding, multitudinous bridge ("with pipes and tobacco"—as Goldsmith says, to indicate debauchery in the 18th century), sympathy and good-fellowship again—though of a homely and prosaic kind, and a confidential report, which I found the other day, upon myself as a "very clever and keen officer." Shades of Balliol!

To Mrs. Robertson

Blandford,
Jan. 30, '16.

You ask me for news, and cheerful news. Well, although I have no more news than usual, at least my letter-writing day has coincided this time with a fit of quite aggressive contentment. This is due fundamentally to the fact that the Assistant-Adjutant has been away conducting a draft to France, and for a

few days I have been taking his place: which has given me complete freedom from all parades (which are the real cause of boredom here), an extra ten minutes for breakfast every morning, and morning till evening in the Orderly Room—that great sanctum and centre of administration with a sentry outside it—with very little to do except my own work. And my own work has been an exhaustive analysis—in my beautiful Service Pocket-Book—of all the British hand grenades (most interesting) with diagrams and sections in black and red inks. There is nothing I like better than pottering about with a notebook and a pen. I should like to send John one of my diagrams with a full explanation, but it might keep him awake at nights! Also on Saturday morning (and the previous morning too) I was sent down to cash cheques in Blandford, which gave me the opportunity of two delightful rides in company of a most instructive groom. And in the afternoon I took part in a very strenuous and exhilarating game of football—though the play was rough and foul, and we lost: in spite of my incessant smoking I was in good form and full of energy. It is a good thing to play football for the Battalion, as it gives one *kudos* in the eyes of the men: I got into good odour with the authorities at Wool thereby some months ago. After the game I had a very good bath, a very good dinner, and bridge until 1 a.m. And this afternoon I had a really delightful ride, over a first-class bit of country, and an unexceptionable tea—with soft-boiled eggs at a penny a piece.

Really—apart from the dreary work of parades—this is a very cosy little life, in the "Naval Camp." There is not a shadow of the fuss and fret that was a

blot on our fine 11th Battalion, a "telling-off" is never a very serious matter here. There are short hours and few responsibilities (none at all for me), the Coy. Commanders know that they are no better —but only luckier—than the "Young Officers"— everybody tolerates everybody else, and most of us like one another well enough. I find that my philosophy of mimicry and of treating everything as a joke is very acceptable to the young officers (as second lieutenants are now called), while I seem for several months past to have given a good impression to the senior officers. I know that I have profited a good deal from the quiet and incidentally healthy life of an attached young officer; but it is the Front (trying as that is) that I am really anxious for. You see that I am human and imperfect, and ambition is the thing that we cannot resist unless we are wholly Saints. And I want to do what my old friends have done.

To F. F. Urquhart

Nearing Folkestone,
Feb. 9, 1916.

Last time in this train we were bound for Italy. I have had sudden orders for France, and not a moment to spare for even this urgent letter of farewell.

It is a glorious thing to be able to put to the test those things that one always believed in, as sure comforts in trial, the memories of the past, the great things of thought, the sense of the beautiful everywhere, the scraps which make for each man his own philosophy.

I am as happy as you could wish, but not merely because of these thoughts and the memory of dear friends and sweet farewells, and the pride of resistance to whatever may come, but because we, Slig, have the faith surer than these things (which the Stoic has, and no more) —we have the confidence "which keeps its sweetest happiest tone for one beloved Friend alone." Pray that I may be good at the Front.

To his Mother. (*Diary Letter*)

Feb. 1916.

You know how much I always enjoyed France and the French: France—un frisson d'eau sous les arbres —and the French—that strange mixture of Roman strength and Christian holiness, liberty, frivolity, modernity—the people who built the Cathedrals and the Boulevards. There are pictures by Frenchmen in England which quite give you a taste and a reminiscence of all these things: of north-coast harbours, of rivers, of the artistic trees of France, and of farms and orchards—just like the farm where I am quartered. It is now a fresh evening after a long storm of rain: there is an orchard and an old Chateau across the way, by the side of a stream. At this moment the orderlies are laying tea for the Company mess—we mess by Companies out here, half-a-dozen officers at most—in a very French little cottage. (And a wonderfully good and full menu we have.)

A wonderfully muddy road leads from here to my billet. There I sleep with a pleasant 'stable companion,' with the lowing of cattle in the yard just

outside, and the munching of horses the other side of my bed-room wall.

I have already become almost an inmate of the family circle of my hosts, through whose living-room I have to pass on all my goings in and out,—never without a cheery remark on the time of day. I console the young Madame for her 'poilu' brother in the trenches; I discuss the weather with the old Farmer; and have I not given biscuits and chocolate to the Petit, le bon petit gosse? while the Grandame looks on with unspeakable interest. All of which has its material advantages—not to speak of the touching gift which the farmer brought in this morning—an enormous apple from his orchard. It is a useful thing to have some facility with the language; all the way out I was made interpreter and business-manager to our party. I like trying to talk, and the French always want to do the same; during one train-journey a French officer demanded whether any of us spoke the tongue, and entered into a long conversation with me—long and animated. It is a fine thing to speak with men who have looked into the eyes of danger for 18 months. And it was very interesting to hear him ask always "what they think in England"—and what the Labour-partie wants to do. I parted from him with an Adieu and a très cordial serrement de main.

I said good-bye to you last at the Hotel du Louvre, Boulogne. We were a party of 8 there, from the Warwicks, but at our next step we were rudely torn apart, and posted to Battalions which we had never expected to see. Of course I had imagined that I was to rejoin the 11th, but the War Office List was made out in black and white, and unchangeable. We had to await

orders to join our units, and meanwhile were put into an O.T.C., the same sort of heart breaking business of which I have had so much in the past. But this only lasted a day, when five of us got orders to leave at 4 a.m. the next morning. We marched to the station with a draft of men, and boarded our train at 10 p.m. —in darkness: quite the most realistic bit of war-sentiment and thrill which I have yet experienced. We felt then for the first time that the curtain had rung up on "the real thing," our valises in the luggage-van, and the rest of our worldly goods on our backs. The most exciting thing was to see drafts of Scotch Regiments moving off: there is something in their faces, something in their physique, something in the tartan and glengarry, which makes them look mighty men of war: but most of all there is a fighting spirit which they seem to express somehow.

Needless to say I did not sleep a wink in the train, and felt in very poor humour when we stopped next morning at a certain station, with some three hours to wait. I became quite fluent with a porter who nearly lost me my valise! Of course we all rushed to a hotel and whiled away the time with omelettes, after the most thorough wash that I suppose that insanitary place has ever seen. Then on to the next halt, which we had expected after many days of travelling to be our final resting-place. But our wanderings were not at an end.

We got out at the wayside station concerned only to be told by the R.T.O. that two were to stay there, while I and two others (quite decent fellows fortunately) were ordered to wait about five hours for a train which would take us to a further destination. It is wonderful

how soon one gets to know one's fellows well enough to make these numerous partings a bit of a trial. The three of us who remained, after a villainous sojourn in one of the foulest and stuffiest villages in the world (where even omelettes lost their savour), caught our train onward full of that curious home-sickness which takes the heart out of one just before some new beginning in life. I felt as I have only felt at Templecombe on October 13th, 1905 and at Brighton on January 30th, 1915. . . . With all my heart I strafed the war, the Kaiser, and everything that is his. Who were the 14th Warwicks and what were we in for?

On the way we had to break journey yet again, and when the R.T.O. invited us to travel on by the 5.55 a.m., we thought that a good sleep in a Hotel was far better than scrupulous adherence to instructions. So we found our hotel and had an excellent dinner, which relieved our weariness and painted the future in the colour of red wine. A hot bath and a long deep sleep! The Hotel was of the Pickwickian type, with a great court-yard (roofed in) and bedrooms opening on a balcony above: the court-yard was full of little tables, and everywhere the blue uniform of French Officers, many of them old and fat, but many too wearing medals which called up visions of Souchez, Tahure, and the Hartmannsweilerkopf. An inspiring company.

I sent you a card of the Cathedral: it has not the glass of Chartres, or the variety and wonder of Ely, or the green lawns and grey Close of Wells—but for French Gothic it has hardly a rival.

On again next afternoon through low fields and floods, arrival at our destination in a wet grey mist. Our hearts in our boots—both equally damp—and on

our shoulders ponderous packs. . . . Told that we had two miles to walk. Very hungry, and roads equal to the worst in the Mendips. We soon gave up even talking. . . .

Arrival at minute village: directed to Headquarters. The Battalion isolated with measles. . . . C.O. has no idea that we were coming, and does not need us.

But—he gives us an excellent tea, and we find that the Acting Adjutant—with whom is all power—is none other than old C. W., one of the Gondoliers at Downside in 1911.

Introduced to my Company Officers in the Company Mess already described. Am only a supernumerary—but the officers are gentlemen, one from Oxford, one from Cambridge, and make me delightfully at home. After a full and sweet dinner I sleep my first real night at the Front.

Not exactly at the Front—but some miles behind. The cannonade is never heard here except when the Germans are strafing *very* violently. The Battalion has had a turn in the trenches, and is enjoying a lucky measure of rest. Very little work to do, only enough to keep the men fit. In the mornings we have a 'Riding School' for un-equestrian officers—I had a fiery nag this morning!—and hardly anything to do after 1 p.m., except reading, writing and bridge. All the Company officers know their Gilbert & Sullivan well—A unique Battalion!

I am quite content to be even a supernumerary here, —even to lose all my seniority and my last hopes of promotion. I am beginning to feel that I have done all that I can do by trying, and my ambitions are narrowing to the single desire for "a safe and speedy return."

We are in a Division of some fame, and a fine Battalion we are, full of the better-class men. It is the "first city of Birmingham Battalion"—once half made up of gentlemen, and still full of clerks and educated folk. Excellent physique too. It will fight well.

Can it be that we are being reserved—shall I say fattened up?—for some great and final offensive after a comfortable space of quiet life—which will settle up one's own and other people's destiny in one warm week? Let us hope the luck will not turn.

Well, you have my news and my frame of mind—not much excitement but content. Write to me now often, about *any* old thing: and God bless you all.

To Cyril Bailey

21 Feb. '16.

You would think it well worth while writing to me if you knew what a letter means out here. Just fancy my getting two this evening from distinguished Dons of Balliol! There are men in this Battalion from Magdalen (Ox.) and Downing (Cant.) and Corpus (Ox.): but I feel it a distinction to get letters from the Domus de B. As you will gather, this Battalion is a cut above others—it is the 14th R. War. R., and the First City of Birmingham—originally intended for "Pals" in the early days when all thought the war meant simply a few months of blood and melodrama: later on, when people got bored and went for commissions, it was still meant to be confined to the non-banausic recruits: and even now, when 600 of the first enlisted have become officers, the rank and file

represent a high standard of intelligence, physique, and even wealth. And the officers happen to be gentlemen, which robs the life out here of the only terrors it ever had for me. It had seemed likely that I would rejoin my old unit where I did not find it all smooth going. Here my Company-officers, who are the only ones that matter at the Front, are quite delightful. The Magdalen man, V. (second eight, I Mods., II Greats) is a most excellent fellow, with a retentive memory that ranges over Sherlock Holmes, Kim, The Poetics and all Gilbert and Sullivan,—knows all the characters of Oxford, and is quite a character himself. In the matter of Gilbert and Sullivan indeed there are so many initiated here that there are very few songs, sentences, or gnomes in any of the operas which *somebody* does not remember.

A fortnight or so ago I happened to be in Town for a couple of Lectures on Gas (there is one very frightful gas which deprives the victim permanently of the relish for Tobacco!) and was spending the week-end with Alec at Brighton, when a wire came for me at 11.30 p.m., ordering me off at once—though as a matter of fact I managed even then to get two days' leave. It was really quite an exciting and jolly sensation, and it is very comforting to feel that one can never again be one of the officers who 'have not been out': and although none of us out here have any sentimental illusions about the war, and know that everything in it is waste—especially as touches our own safety!—still it is a great relief to have the thing settled at last, and to have got over all the partings and novissima verba. On the whole I think I have struck oil here. After a very deliberate journey out with a lot of other

men I knew, we were eventually told off in quite a haphazard way to various Battalions—

> O dulces comitum valete coetus !
> Longe quos simul a domo profectos
> Diversae variae viae reportant.

It is strange how hard it is to part from quite ordinary fellows after only a few months of this communal life. We are like the young φύλακες.

So in the end I found myself coming here with two others, rather down in spirits with the uncertainty of our future, but we were at once made at home and are quite content. As I say, it is a good Battalion and has already had its share of work and discomfort in the trenches: I have joined it at a time when it is isolated for measles, and has been enjoying a prolonged rest in an inconsiderable village which it monopolises —doing only just as much work as is necessary to keep well-trained men in condition (not very much), with concerts, whist-drives, football, and a special riding-school for officers. It is on the whole the pleasantest time I have yet had in the Army, and I trust it will be continued for some weeks to come—indeed until it is time for some decisive melodramatic effort, which will bring us either rest or fame, and perhaps be the beginning of the end—which cannot but come this year. It is a fine destiny to take part in this momentous cast.

That is the hope in which I wait here—parading, riding, playing bridge, writing, and reading " Le Crime et le Chatiment " of Dostoieffsky—a book to keep the old people from the fireside, children from play, and subalterns from their longed-for bed.

I am great friends with the family where I am

billeted—especially with la petite Rachel, who is about the age of another little lady I know: the other morning M'sieur brought me in an enormous apple of his own growing. Malis me Galatea petit.

By the way I also read Bridges' "Spirit of Man"—a book of great price at any time. This account quite exhausts the tale of my occupations. I don't *think* much—except occasionally in letters.

I can't say I have met any of the Balliol men: perhaps I shall some day—in a battered and glorious trench, non indecoro pulvere. How splendid to be able to quote Latin at will without "reference to the Question," to write verses and stop when I like, and even to make mistakes and howlers. "Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself"—as Walt Whitman says in a lyrical passage. I was very bucked at your comments. Do write to me, Cyril, again and again, till your Lamachus returns, *καὶ τοῖς τοιούτοις λόγοις αὖθις ἐντυχώμεθα*. I shall keep your letter.

Yours affectionately,

STEPHEN.

P.S. Do please make any *news* I send you the common property of any friends of ours that you meet. I shall tell them to do the same by you. Please let dear Slig know that I got both his letters, and "Aunt Hat's": that I just agree with him about Amiens, especially in relation to Chartres, and that I am sure I have seen the French Officer[1] whom he refers to—or else his brother. Amabo te.

[1] This was a French officer met many years ago outside the west front of Amiens Cathedral, who, after expressing great admiration for the building and the sculpture, finally summed up his feelings in the words, "Mais, c'est que ça a du coûter de l'argent, ça!"

To F. F. Urquhart

March 1, 1916.

I wrote some little while ago to Cyril, giving him an account of the routine here. Doubtless he showed you some of my letter, which after all was not very exciting: well, we are still at the same old round—though it may be broken soon,—so that shall be my excuse for a little bavardage and a letter of generalities.

Your "Spirit of Man" has been invaluable, and I have begun on it again: it certainly goes up into the trenches with me. On the way out I bought Dostoieffsky's "Le Crime et le Chatiment," which has kept me absorbed ever since, though I have finished it now. It reminds one of 'Le Disciple,' and is at least as good: though everybody does such impossible things—e.g.:

"La jeune fille poussa un cri.—'Hum!' dit Raskolnikoff.—"

although 'Hum' may doubtless mean something more in French—and there is such a plentiful lack of gentlemanly behaviour. Still, I suppose such novels are not really *morbid*. By the way one has plenty of time to spare out here, even if one does usually spend it in sociability; so any old book of an improving nature would be welcome at any old time, and could probably be returned to you intact.

It is curious how, realising as one does that this is not "the life for a man like me," and having as one does any amount of leisure, one is nevertheless assimilated to the atmosphere that one finds: and, instead of writing *verses* or *very* serious letters, or reading hard, or doing a praeparatio mortis, one just plods through the monotony of parades and looks for refreshment in much riding and bridge, and even has long talks

of Varsity life and arguments in the Varsity manner with the Oxonians and Tabs with whom I am providentially associated. After all, if the whole war—as we agree—is a hopeless waste of energy, why should we not waste our time while we have it to waste, in a warm billet and good company? That is the unsettling influence of this strife, which makes one realise the precarious tenure of our time, and the insignificance of any individual efforts, and as a result gives one the false idea that nothing matters. But it is perhaps a just feeling that one has: that until one can shut one's study door again, and know that one's time is one's own—to reap at leisure the fruits of unforced thought, one can do no more than one's routine-duties (as well as one can) and leave one's unmatured thoughts and works and ambitions to the days which may or may not return.

You ask why we are having an idle time? That is the merest chance, and nothing in comparison with the work one will sooner or later have to do. And as for individual insignificance and the futility of special efforts—well, the knowledge needed by an officer is not infinite: his real work is something revealed in a moment, and done or marred in accordance with impulses which can hardly be trained: out here he is a piece of goods which may be transferred from one environment to another suddenly, and in any environment his effectiveness or influence is circumscribed: it may be, and indeed always is, his duty to risk the wastefulness of destruction simply to inspire or encourage other men. Personal control works within strict limits. No, our main business is to wait for sudden crises and emergencies, which come unannounced,

and where success and safety cannot be calculated or guaranteed.

That is why we fall back upon the simple life, and try and get as much out of one another's company as we can while there is still the chance. One loses any desire

"To vary from the kindly race of men."

And, leading this passive existence, we are blessed with no worries and no regrets. Our little lot—the Company officers—happen to be very a decent set: we get our simple pleasures and we enjoy them.

And then when we think of the return from the war and the happiness we shall indulge, one remembers all the shining happiness of the past which has made life worth living—The Mendips, the Cher, Snowdon, Chartres, The Prarion, Subiaco . . .

"Non tamen irritum quodcumque retro est . . ."

To his Mother. (*Diary Letter*)

9th March, 1916.

As at last we have our orders to rejoin our Division, and have doubtless finished with the measles, I think I owe you—and the place we are leaving—another letter while there is still the chance to write it. So far I have mainly described the journey out and the routine of pleasures and duties in this place. I am now going to try and give you an idea of a French village under more or less peaceful conditions: in a few days no doubt we shall be seeing things of a different kind. My only regret at the thought of leaving, as we

do on Saturday, is the regret which I always feel at leaving any place, and breaking even the thin ties which bind me to a dull little spot, which I don't want ever to revisit and where we live a second-rate sort of life.

I only say second-rate in comparison with the life one might be leading and the life one used to lead. It is most wonderful, not only that ordinary people of every nation dragged into this war manage to stand the most impossible hardships, but that we positively enjoy the life whenever we are not having those hardships or when we can snatch a few common comforts. And that makes one simply marvel how enjoyable one's former life must have been, had one appreciated it to the full; and one thinks how much one will appreciate Home and peace again, even though the Oxford life may not be repeated.

At the moment I am rather keen on getting through with my first tour in the trenches. It is that really which makes one, and doubtless others, feel in oneself the difference between a man who has "*been there*" and one who has not. I can't repeat too often that so far I might as well have been still at Blandford as far as danger or excitement goes. It is true that I like my fellow-officers (who resent anything of the L. kind most violently) and have been formally declared "one of themselves": I also think that I will manage well enough with my men, and get the best out of my N.C.O.'s by treating them as I would wish to be treated by my own seniors. But I know that I have really to win my spurs yet—by slaving about for the men in the trenches, and pretending not to mind the assorted devilries of the ingenious Hun.

I am rather sorry in a way that we are not having another Sunday here. Sunday means a long ride: also I met the Curé of —— the other day, who says Mass for us,—aired my imperfect French for half-an-hour, discussed Oxford, Downside, Philosophy, the Spirit of France, and finally had the promise from him of a French novel. The company had been sent out to mend a road (quite an experience, both for the Birmingham clerks who stood in leather jerkins and hacked at a frosty ground, and for the officers who strolled or rode up and down or ate their al fresco lunches on a high sunny hill:—quite jolly) when the Curé came along on a bicycle, in his rather amusing habit with a great sash, and tried to speak English with some of the men. One of them was very High-Church, and apparently told him that the officer standing near by came from Oxford. I can't say how he knew. Mass here is the usual French ceremony—held in a church disfigured by huge chandeliers and pasteboard glories. Two ragged urchins serve,—when they are not looking round at three of their friends, who always sit together and giggle—rather like the two little boys in church at Cambridge on December 26th, 1915. This frivolity, and likewise the continual noises that distract the faithful, are frowned upon with solemnity but with no effect by a large sacristan with enormous moustaches and a coat with only one button, covered by a very short surplice. This functionary sits on a stool in front of the altar and sings all the chants himself, to the same tune, but louder and if possible louder, every Sunday. You kneel throughout on boards two inches wide. The collection is if anything more noisy and disedifying than even at the church in Bayswater.

These are the externals. But it is the Mass that we get, and no one else does. . . .

Friday: By Jove!—I started this letter with the intention of trying to do justice to the village and surroundings of "—— sur ——" Now I have something better to relate. Last night we had orders to move this morning instead of Saturday (no particular hurry, but just in order to break up a long journey into two days), and we *have* moved. Out at half past six this morning to find snow coming down: this however ceased by the time the Company paraded after breakfast. Just as we were moving off we heard a plaintive singing which came towards us from the river; then a little procession appeared, with the Curé at the head and behind him the old Sacristan, —a village funeral. We came to attention at once, sloped arms, the officers saluted the bier, and the procession passed on to the church. . . .

At 9 a.m. the Battalion was on the move. We marched, with halts of ten minutes every hour, until 2.30. I am glad I had had a good night's rest and a good breakfast: it is hard work marching with a full pack and nothing particular to eat. You can never imagine the weight of one's full equipment until you have tried it! In the summer no doubt there is plenty of charm in wide and rolling champs de blé: but at this season the country-side, which is all under cultivation, is very cheerless as it spreads out monotonous, broken here and there by villages distinguished only by their varying degrees of dirt, and covered with thin snow. However, we got to the end of our march at 2.30, and were met there by the Billeting-party, who showed our Company (some 170 men) to the couple

of rooms, or rather barns, where they have to spend the night. It was not long before the men had their mess-tins full of hot stew, and a fire lit in the braziers. But it was not till 4.30 that I and the officer with whom I am billeted (the jolly Oxford man) got our first nourishment since breakfast—in the form of 4 " Oxo Cubes " boiled over a " Tommy's Cooker " and helped out with a hunk of bread wheedled from Madame. Madame has a temper of vinegar and a tongue with an edge, both exasperated by her previous lodgers: moreover she has an unintelligible accent; but after a laborious effort in my best French I made her eyes twinkle, and she even went so far as to ask me if I too had a " Madame " at home. At about 6 p.m. we had a poached egg and a great piece of buttered toast with a cup of " Kaffay-o-lay," and this carried us on until 8, when our cook—Latham—prepared us a wonderful meal of soup, sardines on toast, hot roast with tinned peas, peaches and real coffee. And then I went on with this letter till it was time to go to bed, which I shared with the Oxford man. Very snug!

Latham the cook is a real *character*. Of great corporeal size, a ready wit and a fluent tongue, he is the best of fellows and has a regular genius for ferretting out kitchens, cozening reluctant Madames to do everything for him (sometimes at the point of the bayonet!), begging, borrowing and stealing; he is also a past-master at culinary improvisation. Incidentally he is a very good Catholic. Around him revolve a system of minor stars—our orderlies—who play second fiddle to Latham, but are full of character in their own way—especially one with a most valuable comic face, who used to be a stock-broker's clerk. These gentry can

usually manage to "snaffle" a ride on some waggon when we are marching (on futile pretexts which we find for them, for their health is of great value to us!) And when we are in billets they live in the kitchen —where Latham makes fluent small talk with La Famille—or potter about with our valises and get us those buckets of water which are the first things that the Englishman demands.

Saturday: off on the march again after one of Latham's best breakfasts. A clear cold day. On Friday we had done 14 miles; to-day we have 12 to do. The men trudge along, every other one suffering from soft feet—halting for ten minutes in each hour. The pack simply cuts through your shoulders: but it is the officer's duty to double up and down the column as if he was enjoying it, checking the intervals and the step, and generally imitating the methods of Father O'Flynn,—encouraging Hibell to do the last three miles on one foot, slating Allen for perpetual neglect to dress by the right, and carrying a man's rifle if he is very done up.

So at 1 p.m. we march noisily, to the strains of ragtime, into a town about the size of Newton Abbot. Here the old game of billeting begins again, with its corollary of feet-inspection an hour or so later, and it is not till about 3.30 that I get my pack off and a snack of lunch. Then we hunt about buying boracic powder for the men's feet: have a cup of chocolate and some of those very rich French cakes (living the life we do, we can take a few liberties with the digestion): and as the Company Mess-box fails to arrive by 7.30 we go out and have an inferior dinner in a Hotel.

The Lady of the house where we were billeted in

this place was a very decent sort, with a most delightful little boy—a type of face you would never see in England—only 2½ years old. There is still a plate on the front door with his father's name on it: but he won't see his father again. C'est la guerre, voyez-vous.

It is rather amusing work going round inspecting the men's feet, etc.! One man says 'e 'asn't 'ad time to do it yet, sir, because he shares a towel with his brother, who hasn't come in yet, and no one else will lend him a face-towel. (I infer that nobody minds using his own face-towel for his own feet.)

Just as I write, Madame rushes in to say that Latham has just called the French people "cochons"! A most unfortunate incident! and though I spend half-an-hour in deshabille trying to soothe Madame and her still more unreasonable Mother, it is all no use—and our servants have been turned out of the cuisine and made to do their cooking in the same room where four of us officers are sleeping and eating!

But I am going on too fast . . . .

Sunday morning—beautiful weather and a ten mile march through country which would really strike one as charming if one did not remember England. At 1 p.m. we reach a loathsome village where the whole British Army seems to be quartered and the hunt for billets is even more lengthy and exhausting than before. My pack remains on my back until 2.30, when we manage to get a meal, consisting almost entirely of a tinned tongue and a great cake which the Robertsons most kindly sent out to me, followed by a charming assortment of chocolates which were a birthday-present to me from darling K. All these good things were much appreciated.

Well, after going to see my platoon a couple of times and tooting again and again round the horrible straggling village in search of billets for ourselves, I had a fit of very complete exhaustion, or rather inanition, which did not pass away till I was well into one of Latham's big dinners. After that we smoked (though as a matter of fact we are doing that all day long), read the Daily Mail, and then I went on with this letter until the little scene occurred demanding my intervention.

Then I retired to bed on a stone floor, and not having my blankets well arranged spent a night which for discomfort equalled the famous nightmare described in "Iolanthe."

To-day is Monday and of course it is my turn to be Battalion Orderly Officer, a duty which entails going round every billet about three times in the day. What a life!

To-morrow I think we move again—we are steadily getting nearer the trenches, where we shall probably find ourselves this week. That will be the address of my next letter.

To Mrs. Robertson

March 14, '16.

A really delightful day has just come to a worthy end—the coming of the post with a letter from Mother, a letter from K. and a letter from you. I have just sent off a second instalment of the Diary: it will come to you shortly, I hope, and I can say that it will be more interesting than the last one. It covers the

whole series of events which has taken us from the dull inactivity of —— to a village (from which I now write) about four miles from the firing line, to which we move up tomorrow night. It is all quite delightful. The company is at present in charge of a lieutenant (the jolly Oxford man) and four second lieutenants, and we all get on well with one another, so that we are free from some of those little worries which I dislike far more than the thought of shells, which might have fallen any moment upon parts of the road which we covered today. . . .

P.P.S. Your delightful doll has just arrived! Thank you so much. I promised to send it to my hosts at —— as soon as it came, but we like it so much that we have decided to carry it into the trenches as our Mascot.

This *is* an interesting experience! Had a beautiful sleep last night on the hardest of hard boards.

To Charles Robertson

March 17, '16.

I am burning to write a letter while certain impressions are fresh: a letter which ought to have been written 24 hours ago, but I was very tired at the time and my fingers were not so lively as my fancy: a letter which will be all about myself, and perhaps not as intimate as I could wish: but nevertheless a letter which I am determined to send to *you*, because I owe you a letter (and have long owed it). It must be written at once before my impressions fade, and before I get callous. It will have the interest at least of recording a unique day in my life.

Though we have not yet been in the actual trenches, I have had a day of the real thing—full length and colours. In a day I feel that I understand what we are in for, and what horror is our daily bread. But before I say a word, I must assure you on my honour that these are only my own feelings, neither intended nor expected to depress anybody: and that I am as strong and fit as I have ever been in my life. I am only going to try and give you a personal idea of things that are the stale common-places of a drawn-out war, and in a few days will lose even the interest of a splendid and terrible novelty.

In my last letter home, which is to be sent to you like the first, you will have accompanied me for three days on the march towards the Line, and parted company at ——, the loathsome village, where I was tramping round as orderly officer. That was on Monday.

I have seldom had a more pleasant al fresco day than Tuesday: the air full of spring "with a warm sun in it, and birds crying out." The men marched capitally throughout, and even the pack on one's shoulders forgot to annoy. By the way, I must remind you that the equipment in which we march is a belt and two straps over the shoulders: to the belt are attached a revolver, a pouch containing ammunition, a full water bottle, and a haversack containing "Iron rations," chocolate, a Tommy's Cooker, torch, candles, towel, flask of brandy, and other things: while in the pack, which is attached to the shoulder straps, are a shirt, three pairs socks, waterproof waders, a trench-coat with fleece lining, a second towel, mittens, a periscope, a waterproof sheet, note-paper, a huge muffler, a hold-all with every imaginable fitting to it,—and anything

else. The White Knight was not a bit up to date! Also we have a map-case, a pair of field-glasses, and two gas-helmets on our person. And lately I have been also carrying a special pistol for firing rockets. Altogether a remarkable turn-out.

Well, it was a lovely day and we had over an hour's halt on the march for dinners. And the village at which we billeted for the night was a great improvement on the previous one, quiet and comfortable in an amber light. We slept late on Wednesday morning, and no-one did anything all day beyond cleaning and overhauling equipments. This was because the Battalion had to go up to the trenches that night.

We fell in at 5.45, the leading officer of the company carrying Mrs. Robertson's doll as a Mascot. The men were in good form and sang continuously. And then we halted just outside X. A British gun spoke in darkness near us. Three companies disappeared, trench-ward bound. Our Company had the luck to be in reserve, billeted in large houses where we could sit at tables and sleep in beds. Now, the C.O. has said that the officers have marched very well this last week, and I personally have done at least as much as anyone else: so I was now quite ready for my bed.

But no. At about 10.30 p.m. I was detailed to take a party which was to unload wagons at midnight, and accordingly I had to parade them—after an hour at gambling, at which I won 7 francs 50, the only way of filling up time when you're tired and cannot go to bed. In the moonlight the ruin and desolation of this place has a sort of infernal grandeur. Streets and squares have been torn to pieces, and one great building has been the target for the Huns' heavy pieces: white

stones from the ruin choke the street like the Moraine of a horrible glacier. The square in which we were waiting was sparsely dotted with groups of men in steel helmets, returning from the trenches. Our wagons did not come till an hour and a quarter later than we had expected, and it was not till 2.45 a.m. that we got back to billets—where of course we have to sleep in our clothes, as we now possess nothing but what we carry.

But the morrow, Thursday, was the great day! I rose at 7.30 and had the luxury of a cold tub, which freshened one up for a morning busier than I ever anticipated. After breakfast I was suddenly warned to proceed to the Field Cashier at Blank and draw money for the Battalion, before 12 midday. It was not till 10.30 that I got away from the Orderly room with the necessary papers and with orders to get to Blank at all costs in time. The Huns had already started strafing when I was on my way to the Orderly Room: distant mutters like the crumpling of stiff paper, a vibration which comes nearer, and loudens to the rush of an express train—and a shell is over your head. They don't seem to find many bodies, but they have a beautiful sound as if each one were coming straight for your head.

To this accompaniment I trotted back to our Company billets in search of a Company Bicycle. Alas! no bicycle—except an old thing with flat tires, about two feet high, which the Sergeant Major dug up in his billet. On this rusty mechanism I started off at 10 to 11, due to cover an uncertain distance (really it was no more than four miles), imperfectly instructed as to the way. As for my own condition I can only say it was a very hot day. . . .

Soon I got on to a road which I knew nothing about, with the "crumps" buzzing like anything overhead: fortunately they were looking for a battery a bit further on. There were only a few men about and no one knew the way to anywhere. Of course I am only describing a common event, which is what one has come out here for, but it was unlucky to have my first shelling alone, ignorant of the kind of shells being fired and of the various warning-signals which I heard. One of my platoon happened to see me pedalling along just ten yards beyond the burst of one "crump," and told me about it to-day. At last one dropped only the other side of some houses, and a little piece of its stuffing dropped softly at my feet: I decided, even at the cost of retracing my steps and losing time, to seek a healthier and a more certain road. Of course I was praying like anything because it was a nervy business just for the first time, but my real anxiety was to fail in a battalion-duty: who knows when we would get another chance of drawing the Battalion money. I got shown the right road eventually, and the crumping seemed to get less frequent and at any rate more distant. But the crimping rims of my bicycle were a serious question,—also the time, 11.15. However, I passed an R.E. billet with bicycles in it, and after searching for ten minutes found an officer who authorized my borrowing one.

And then my only worries were conflicting directions as to the road—a particular piece of the road marked "Traffic Forbidden" which in my ignorance I imagined to be a Sniper's Hunting Ground and pedalled over furiously,—and the excitement of wondering whether I would arrive before noon. Arrive I did

with five minutes to spare, and returned with about 6,000 francs and a loaded pistol. Even then I did not get it off my hands and have a rest till about 2.45, by which time I was really tired—having been up till 3 that morning. And then suddenly an officer had to be detailed to take charge of a party due for work from about 9 p.m. till midnight. You see, we are the Company in Reserve and have to take up stores to the trenches from the dumps, dig communication-trenches and mines, and clean up roads. We decided to draw lots for the job—only one officer being needed—and thank Heavens, I drew a blank. This meant an easy afternoon and evening: but I was too tired to do anything but read a magazine. This morning—Friday—we were out for four hours cleaning up a filthy road half-hidden by rubble from shattered cottages, with mud and water and green slime, I daresay it was a necessary work: but I was heartily sorry for the poor city-men of Birmingham who were up half last night and then had to truckle to this dirty work. However—

I have been out this afternoon exploring the—but if I gave you any description of what we saw, I should be giving you the name of the place: and that must not be. Let us make a note of this afternoon's walk, as one of the things we must chat about after dinner when next I come to Hove by the 6.30 from Victoria. —By Jove! those are the pleasures we do not think about too much out here, or we should not be as contented as we are. If we did do any thinking, we should go off our heads: one cannot realise things in England, any more than one can know a book till one has read it. However we play bridge, smoke incessantly, have a good cook, indulge in part

songs, and are irreverent about our superiors: in fact we keep our sanity.

To his Mother

March, 23rd.

I cannot believe that it is I who am having this experience, though it is an everyday experience in the lives of a few million people. Before I say a word about it, be assured that I am well and happy, having got more or less initiated into the superficial and preliminary terrors. Imagine a great endless ditch across a blasted plain, and from 30 to 80 yards away another ditch full of Huns. In the ditch the men work, dig, build, drain, eat, and shoot, or rest in little shelters: behind are other ditches running back, and in them are little holes with deep flights of steps which lead down to long holes or cellars hacked out of the chalk. In these we will take shelter if bombarded, and the men rest when off duty: in one of them are three wooden frames strung with wire on which I and two other officers sleep. They are lit by candles guttering in bottle-necks, and some of them are roughly furnished, as for example the Company Head Quarters where I am now writing, and where seven officers eat and talk and read. They are all very draughty, we have nothing but our clothes and macintoshes, and the weather is damp and cold; but a brazier of coke dispels some of the gloom. I have a little sketch of this Rembrantesque interior, which I will work up and send you later. No, on second thoughts I will send it as it is—explaining that there are really seven officers

in the room, that they are all wearing indiarubber thigh-boots, and one of them a steel helmet.

So we live in a labyrinth of mud, which cakes us from hands to feet, with one small tin of water daily to wash in. There are plenty of "unhealthy" places in our Company sector, but we have had hardly any heavy stuff sent over, and have so far only one very slight casualty. So far then we are safe enough, and in a few days we go back to hot-baths, a change of clothing and rest.

To his Mother. (*Diary Letter*)

Still in the Trenches,
25th March.

Good gracious! I never meant you to think that we are having a bad time. Rather we have been very lucky so far: our Company having been in the trenches three and a half days with only two slight casualties —a bruised arm and a face slightly cut with glass from a smashed periscope. The Huns just opposite us are very quiet, I am glad to say, and even a bit nervous it seems—continually sending up lights at night-time, in case we should be out in the No-man's land, patrolling or working. The discomforts of trench-life are not insupportable and not an uninteresting experience. The only nasty thing is one's purely physical fear of the noisy things—for a mere bullet-sound has no terrors —but one gets over the feeling with a very little practice. Also the mere excitement is not without its pleasures, not even without its humours—as you will see if you get a very excellent book of pictures called

"Fragments from France" by a Captain Bairnsfather of the Royal Warwicks. Our Brigadier has promised a fiver to anyone who can bring in a German, dead or alive, from the trenches opposite to our Brigade-sector: and we are sitting in the Company H.O. dug-out, racking our brains for a way of earning it. But it is very difficult here!

It is quite amazing how one gets accustomed to things one would have made a huge fuss about at home. For example my neighbour at table has just upset his chop on the floor, has picked it up, and is eating it with added relish. After all, we only have twelve days in the trenches (six back in Reserve) and then a spell of six days' rest, which is due very soon now, in some village behind the line. Here in the Fire-Trenches, we live a queer life, content with an average of 4½ hours sleep each night—although "each night" is only a conventional expression: for we sleep when we get the chance, as you will see from the enclosed sketch which I made the other afternoon in this dug-out. Will you please send it to Mrs. R. for her little John, when you are sending a copy of this letter.

The officer's main duty is his two-hour watch at night, when he patrols the whole line held by the four platoons of the Company, and is entirely responsible for it. The only other men awake are the sentries and the four N.C.O.'s of the watch, one from each platoon, who are patrolling their own platoon-sectors. Five officers divide the ten hours of the night between them, taking a different two hours every night: thank Heavens I have now done my 9-11, 11-1, 1-3, and 3-5 a.m. turns, and am now due for the 7-9 p.m. At —— or a little before, we have . . . but I won't go into

detail. Imagine one of the early morning watches! You sit in the Company H.Q. dug-out till perhaps as late as 11 p.m., in hopes that the post will arrive, and enjoying the warmth of a brazier fed with coke—a strong contrast to one's own dug-out, a cellar thirty feet down in the earth, damp and draughty,—to which however one eventually retires, and lies down in an overcoat on a framework of wood and wire. It is very cold o' nights, but weariness puts one to sleep: and one is distinctly annoyed when a voice echoes in the hollow darkness "1 o'clock"—the voice of the retiring officer of the watch. However, it is not so bad to get up when one has no blankets: and in a few seconds one has taken over the badge of office, viz.:—a pistol for firing a kind of small rocket; dons a steel helmet; calls one's platoon runner (a dim shape huddled in some rat-ridden corner): and is ascending the steps to daylight. And then two hours up and down the line of trench—the whole thing not uninteresting at first. The great point is that, although we live in cellars and labyrinths, between walls of earth a few feet across, one gets air, exercise, and appetite (nor does one feel the want of long or regular sleep)—and in a word keeps fit and cheerful. A most fortunate thing is that we officers are a happy family, and that our Company Commander, a young Captain of twenty-one, who was up at Oxford for a year before the War (so there are three of us old Oxonians), is a delightful fellow, who would and does rather risk personal censure than let in any other officer or man for unnecessary work or unpleasantness, and a man whom one would follow into the Hun trenches without hesitation or fear. So that when we are not actually under fire (and the trenches of

our Company have had practically nothing), one is quite contented and at peace. By the way, as a copy of this letter is due to go to Br. John, I want to add a note for the Headmaster—to the effect that I do not see much of C. W., as he is Battalion Signalling Officer and always with Btn. Head Quarters, but that he is universally regarded as one of the joys of life, and his coming to dine with 'C' Company is one of *the* things that we look forward to when we go back to billets.

These last two days have been cold and the trenches full of snow, so that we have been very busy draining and pumping: but now we hope to recommence our perpetual duty of *strengthening* the trenches and planning little offensives.

To his Mother. (*Diary Letter*)

29th March, 1916.

At last I have some real experiences to write about, and I do not mind describing them to you in full, because you will take them in the right spirit, knowing that one undertook the chance of these things the day one first joined the army, and that I would never write to you anything really worrying. These experiences are delightful to remember—Haec olim meminisse juvabit—and I think they will be interesting to you as well. I am now in the pleasant position of having finished my first Tour in the Trenches, which not only brings you into real touch with the men, but makes you see the whole of life not quite as you saw it before. The two splendid results—splendid for one of a badly nervous temperament—are that in spite of only twenty-

five hours' sleep in seven days I came out thoroughly fit, and that in spite of my first touch of crude and imminent dangers they have left no impression on my memory, have not shaken my famous powers of sleep, nor impaired my almost equally famous appetite for food. Of course I loathe the trenches as much as any other normal and healthy person, and have no desire to return before necessary; but that is the only cloud (if cloud it can be called) over one of the most delicious experiences of a life-time. And that is, the first rest between two tours in the trenches. Purely animal satisfaction! But I cannot give you a general view of my present state of felicity: I can only hope that by the end of this letter, or chronicle of events, you will get the vivid impression which those events have left with me and the state of mind which they have created.

I think my last letter gave you an idea of dug-out existence and included the adventure of the chop which fell upon the floor. A very pleasant life it is, when you're not on duty—when you sit by a warm brazier, listening to the zip and patter of bullets thirty feet above you . . . with no inclination to read a book or a paper (let Verdun fall so long as we are doing our work!)—or even to talk—simply pulling at an old pipe, and not even vexed with the labour of a single thought. Perhaps this state (so far unique for me) was due to lack of sleep; but one was never conscious of the lack, and even preferred the brazier in H.Q. to the chilly wire-bed in one's own dug-out. But of course these were mere *intervals* of leisure, and if ever we heard any noise in our own lines (we hardly ever did) it would be our duty to rush out to the trenches held by our several platoons.

(Note: I continue this letter in bed—viz.: lying in my valise, with my old O.U.H.C. sweater on me and warm as a toast, having just had a splendid hot bath on a freezing night in a roofless and draughty barn,—lying, I say, upon my left side on a stone floor in a room lit by three tallow candles.)

Now after this interruption I go on, simply repeating that all this is meant to interest and not to worry you, as it is all part of the daily business, and we at least have got used to it all, if we do not exactly like it. It does at least lend a spice to existence, and enhances incredibly the intervals of every-day comfort and rest such as we are now enjoying.

Things got much more lively since my last letter. It is true that I have not yet had anything more like that shelling on my first morning in the city of ——. You see, our trenches were so near those of the Hun that the artillery could not safely fire without hitting friend as well as foe: but instead of the shells—the heavy ones—we had hundreds of bullets from extremely efficient snipers, as well as "Whiz-bangs," "sausages," aerial torpedoes, bombs, rifle-grenades and other dirty inventions.

My platoon worked splendidly, one N.C.O. in particular, mainly at strengthening the trenches, which were in a poor state: and a good thing too, for a couple of days before we came out I believe the Germans were relieved, and a new Battalion came in who were much more active than their predecessors. Fortunately however . . . but I must not give that away: I will only say that if we had not worked hard at building up our parapet we should have had many casualties. As it was, our Company had only two in the six days—

one accidentally, and one due to disobedience. But we had plenty of shaves: and I feel that I really profited by your prayers, and also that if I was meant to be hit ever I should have been hit already; which is very cheering. One afternoon I was going along with two officers down the trench when we heard a sickly sort of whistle, fell flat on our faces, and a trench-mortar bomb burst behind the parados over our head. I also had one rather trying night. At dinner I was warned to take a working party to dig somewhere behind D Company's lines at 10 p.m. This meant that it was no use to expect any sleep until the small hours. At the appointed time (a chilly drizzle had set in) I was leaving my own Platoon-trench, when I heard a "zip!" over my head: and when I hurried along I was followed by a dozen more—pursuing me just at my own pace. Now I mention this simply to give you my feelings (and I may add that we like these little experiences, because they give one something to talk about in the Mess)—not to impress you with any imaginary dangers. In reality it was due to a Bosche Machine Gun, which had not opened fire before, and now happened to be "traversing" down the bit of trench where I was walking: perfectly safe as I was below the ground level, but it *seemed* as if some live thing was purposely chasing one down the trench! Well, I got my working party down to D Company's trenches, with some worry and confusion, as the night was dark, the mud tenacious, and the locality somewhat "unhealthy." After inspecting the work to be done, and, being sniped most efficiently—the Hun snipers are very good shots, enterprising, well-placed, concealed and protected: yet they only got one man on our Battalion, whereas our

company alone claims to have sniped a dozen of the Bosches—I proceeded to get the men at work, and then being tired and out of temper, I went back a little to smoke a pipe of peace. No sooner had I sat down (and I had been told that the spot was always perfectly quiet) than I heard the low sickly whistle and the burst of a rifle-grenade just where my men were at work. Of course I had to try and join them at once, though I wished myself miles away and had to grip hard with both my hands and to set my teeth. To my immense relief I met them doubling back: there were twelve in all and a Sergeant—all penned up in a narrow trench, and the rifle-grenades still coming over. What devil's messenger told the Hun that we were there is a mystery to me! Thank Heaven there was a dug-out just by me, into which I ordered as many men as would fit (one man I almost threw down the steps!) and made the others double down the trench. It was a miracle that no-one was hit, as the grenades fell just by some of the men, but the deep viscous mud seemed to have neutralised their effect. As for myself, one man told me that a rifle-grenade fell plump into a sandbag on which I had been sitting a few seconds before! But I came through all right, as I will do always after this well-omened beginning, and I am now glad of the little event, as it brings one into touch with the men and makes them know you henceforth as a sharer of their dangers. After a bit the men were able to go back and recover their rifles, equipment and shovels, but we decided that it was no good working there any more. When we got back to Company H.Q., I strafed round and got all the men a good tot of rum, not forgetting myself. In the end I got to my bed about 2 a.m.,

but the cold and the draught in my dug-out kept me awake till 4, when I crept into the men's dug-out to see if they had a brazier burning. They had, and the warmth was beginning to steal over my numbness and fatigue, when one sleeping figure kicked over the brazier and upset half the burning coke on the floor! By the time we had extinguished the potential fire, it was time to "Stand To." So, you may imagine, I started the day a little washed out. In the afternoon I was about to take a little sleep, when at about 2.15 we suddenly got news that one of our men was mortally wounded. I rushed out with our Coy. Commander, the delightful fellow, and went to my platoon trench, where we learnt that the poor boy had gone out of the trench without leave on some dare-devil game, and was lying about 50 yards out in a position which it was dangerous for anyone else to approach. But on hearing that the fellow might be saved, Captain Bryson immediately rushed out—bent double—and I naturally followed him: we found the platoon sergeant and two stretcher bearers attending him. Poor boy, he was the bravest, keenest, best beloved in No. 11 Platoon: his young freckled face was horribly smashed in by a bullet, but thank Heaven he was unconscious. We called for volunteers, and my N.C.O.'s did a brave bit of work in getting him in on a stretcher: but he died in the trenches. He did his work well, and will not miss his reward.

This being my first casualty I was severely shaken; but one has to get callous both in mind and body, and one does: and an hour's sleep revived me. That night we were due to be relieved: I was simply longing for the rest and change, and had a curious animal

yearning to be spared for it. Also I was longing for a chance to write this letter, not that the news is out of the ordinary, but because a man's *first impressions must* be unique and cannot be repeated.

The relieving Battalion came up in due time, and we filed along the maze of trenches in darkness and silence. It is true that the Huns were sending up flares and lights, but we were not shelled or fired at. After a while we had to get up out of the communication trench, which was needed for others, and walk along the open. Here we were safe enough, except from stray bullets—but imagine the impressiveness of the scene. Darkness lit up by beautiful flares, over a great stretch of plain pitted with shell-holes, dotted with a few blasted trees, and covered with slippery mud. Each platoon was marching separately to a distant rendezvous, and I had to be running up and down all the time seeing that the men kept close together —not so easy a thing as it sounds, for some were weaker vessels, the night was dark, the path very slippery, and we were all suffering from thirst and the weight of our packs. We had been on our feet for over two hours without a rest when we found ourselves once more in the ruined place which I wrote about in a former letter. Strange! but I welcomed the sight of houses even in ruin, and felt as I were nearing Home. But we had to press on to the rendezvous, where we expected mugs of hot tea (our throats were parched, and we had no water). As luck would have it something went wrong, and the Company did not reunite—and my platoon did not have a rest—till some three hours after we left our place in the trenches. Tea was not forthcoming, the route to be covered was longer than

we imagined, and all of us were fairly tired out—I myself having had five hours' sleep, in odd fragments, out of the previous forty-eight.

The men had meant to start singing as soon as we were in safety again, but as a kind of rough tribute to their dead comrade, No. 11 Platoon trudged on in silence. But it was grand in spite of all! Marching along the road by which I had come days before bound for my first tour in the trenches—the trenches marked now by a distant glow of rockets and a fitful mutter of firing,—marching towards our Rest, with the night wind in our faces. At 3.30 a.m. we at last came up with the field-cookers and the hot tea, of which I drank one of the longest draughts that I have ever drained. On again, mile after mile—

fugientes prendimus oras—

till I could have laid down on the very road and slept; —but apart from this drowsiness and the weight of my pack, I was as happy as a lark and could have marched any distance. The men were magnificent. My platoon happened to be leading, and we set a steady pace. A lovely spring dawn was breaking, with a fresh March wind. At five o'clock we reached the top of a hill from which we could get a Pisgah sight of the village where we were to rest. The order came down to halt for ten minutes. I staggered to a bank and fell down on it as though I should sleep for ever, but rose up again at the offer of some rum, which had a wonderful effect and kept me awake for another two hours. At this point, in the morning light, we were all a wonderful spectacle—I myself in particular, covered from head to foot and white as a miller with

the chalky trench mud, clad in a huge trench-coat and a steel helmet, with a great doll on my pack which I carried into the trenches and out again for luck.

Just beyond the place of our halt was a little village, almost pretty enough for England, and doubly delightful as it was the end of our labours—finis longae chartaeque viaeque.

Our men once lodged in their billets—this time in comfortable army huts—we crawled to our own, a draughty stone-floored room, where—joy of joys!—our valises were spread out and blankets unrolled. The remainder tumbled into bed, but weary as I was, I could not follow their example until all my things had been unpacked and arranged, and my trench-gear taken out of sight. I lay down at last at 7 a.m. I rose again at 3.

What joy to have a complete change of clothes—to get out of solid and encrusting mud into propriety and positive smartness!

I can give you no idea of the enhanced and heightened joy of common things in a rest-billet: unless the reading of this letter itself suggests it.—The mere joy of walking in the open air again; fields; spring weather; the orchard behind our billet powdered with morning frost; the long unbroken nights; the unlaborious pipe. Here we can play bridge, football; here we can ride with luck. Here are *Hot Baths*!

But all good things come to an end, and so must letters. So here I leave you again, dear Mother, with every assurance that I am well, happy, and ready to "carry on" again.

To F. F. Urquhart

April 2, '16.
B.E.F.

. . . So the Master[1] is dead,—always for me the very type of an English gentleman, and a great sorrow to me though I knew him so little, and though I did not expect he would see the end of the war. I often think what an incredible good-fortune it would be, if I am fated ever again to walk in Balliol quad; but at its most beautiful that perfect place will always carry with it the thought of a loss—the loss of "*my* Master."

One gets hardened to much of the grimness and crudity of things out here, but not so easily to the pathos, the "lacrimae." To miss a rifle-grenade by a few yards, or to see one of the best men in one's platoon with his face smashed in, is a horror, or at least a shock to which one may get used: but the feeling of spring in a quiet orchard and repose behind the line—a few days of peace between a monotony and routine of trench-work—have far more power to make one *think*. And then the news that the old Master is gone, that he is one with the beautiful past which he seemed to embody in his own life . . .

I have "the Spirit of Man" beside me. How infinitely pathetic is all the splendid Pantheism in it. Thank God that we know Him, and know that we are out here to do His Will. But even without that consolation, I am thankful that I am in the Army where one's duty is plain: for there is much of sheer *waste* in this inconclusive and waiting warfare. However we are laying the foundations of success, I hope, and doing a necessary work.

[1] J. L. Strachan Davidson, Master of Balliol, died March 28.

To F. F. Urquhart

Company H.Q. Dug-out.
April 6, '16.

. . . Why is it that I sit here like a mole, with newspaper on the table and candles for a light, only praying that I may live long enough to finish "The Gathering of the Clans"? I have often heard, and now I quite realise, that here one is mainly occupied with the thought of food and sleep: but in my own case, though we have been shelled to-day, and will be shelled again to-morrow and the day after, I have still a great hunger for *reading*. Though what I have to do at present even with a book about my favourite poet, or with the heaths of Dorsetshire (for I am also deep in "The Return of the Native"), I can't for the life of me imagine. . . .

To Mrs. Robertson

Ap. 11. '16.

What interest there is in dug-out life and in ruined cities is largely the interest of novelty,—a novelty which wears off quickly and an interest which can be exhausted in a single letter. I am afraid the great drawback to life here is the monotony, the littleness, the futility, and I must add the hopelessness of any change, so far as we can see ahead. It would be interesting to know things from the inside, for no doubt there are many "things" to be known: but, living here, one develops a kind of myopia—I think there is something of that name—by which one's vision is confined to very little

things: one lives from day to day, and is satisfied with little things: an animal life.

Besides, the things that decide the fortunes of war to-day are things that pass over one's head—like the shells of the artillery which smash up trenches in which the poor infantryman has to hide, and which he has to patch up again when their Lordships the Gunners have finished their game.

By the way, I noticed in our first tour that our guns gave the Bosches far more than he could return: this time the contrast is even more marked, and today in particular we have had it all our own way. To judge by the noise and persistency of our fire, the Huns must be having any number and weight of explosive to spoil their arrangements. But this of course is only a single sector of the whole endless line, it may be that the Hun is "denuding his front" and concentrating all but a bare minimum of his guns elsewhere.

To Charles Robertson

Ap. 27. '16.

Easter Sunday was a glorious day, as even in nature it always seems to be: and although I was pained at the thought of the first Holy Week for ten years spent away from Downside, and was already suffering from my chill, I did not spend the day any less happily—being able to take things quietly. A great joy for me during the last fortnight has been the reading of "Lorna Doone," which I am quite ashamed to say I have never read before, though a finer book either for a child or an old man or any one at all, could hardly be imagined.

I wonder whether John has ever looked at it? I can't remember ever having been more fascinated by any book, and can well imagine now why so many people re-read it every year of their lives. Our young Company Commander, Captain Bryson, whom I like and admire as much as anyone I have yet come across, has read it twelve times, and he is only twenty-one! I can remember starting the book when I was eight, but then I was fonder of games than of reading. (I was in my private school football eleven then.) The story is centred round a part of England which I visited in my first walking tour, and know well,—one of the many places in the world which I regard as especially my own. To that region I should add Carnarvonshire, the Cotswolds, the Valley of the Exe, South Dorsetshire, the Valley of Chamounix, and the Alban Hills: and since 1915 I must add Sussex!

It was a great pleasure to me to get an Easter letter from Mr. K. I am sure that even he must be a little more confident now about the final issue of the war. I think now of the time when I met him at Apsley. It was eleven months ago. The news was then beginning to be bad indeed (though we did not foresee how bad, and by the end of 1915 things had finally righted themselves). But oh! what a delightful time it was. The trouble with my vaccinated arm had given me an unexpected opportunity of revisiting Oxford—Oxford in the month of May. Ah, I am sure that even if you give up Apsley, you will often be dragged there again by the beauty and associations of Newman's city. The very thought of Oxford, and the smell of the April air, brings back to me the sight of sunshine on well-known walls and the sound of a mower swishing through

the grass of some perfect lawn. How the joy of being there last May almost maddened me with joy. Yet then I had the ordeal of coming out here still before me, and now it is past: still even now the memory of all this maddens me,—not that I am not content to carry on here or miserable at my absence from home —but simply at the thought of how I shall enjoy everything when in the end I do return again. And all this reminds me how perfect a time (in theory) used to be mine: Christmas, say, at Rome, Easter at Downside, summer at Oxford, at the Chalet, in North Wales, autumn again at Downside, and so on. Yet everywhere one has troubles, and everywhere one has the power to be equally happy, because these outside pleasures are so immaterial. I well remember how afraid I used to be of the continuous pleasure of Oxford, and the possibility of *living without any effort.* Now since the war, I think I have learnt some lessons, and am at any rate close on two years *older.*

To F. F. Urquhart

April 22, '16.

. . . . There is one thing to be said, that nothing stands still, and that monotonous as the routine is, one moment is never quite the same as another, but one is either getting killed or wounded or honoured or experienced or brutalised. I am looking forward to the latter consummation, for although I am getting inured to the Major Horrors of War, I am still hopelessly English in my abomination of the Minor ones. However, even as regards endurance under fire I have not much

to talk about, as we have had a very quiet time during my two tours in the trenches,—having had only one killed and two wounded in the Company. Between the noise and external to-do of shell-fire and its actual effect there is often a wonderful difference: the other morning they started off, and as I was officer on duty, it was my job to observe what they were doing; all fell clear of the trenches which we occupied, and out of about eighty some thirty-five did not explode. Later on I saw the damage done—a trench knocked in at three points—no more. I suppose it is the same for each side; but it is certainly a comfort to watch and to hear the great number of shells which *we* manage to send over—far more than the Huns do.

I manage to stand the life all right—even when I am on duty from 12 till 2 a.m., and again from 4 till 5. I do not do much sleeping by day, so that I never get enough during a tour in the Front line, yet I never feel unfit. And I do not think I am too hopelessly "nervy" —though I have not done anything exciting yet: for though I volunteered twice for night-patrols, once the job was cancelled later on, and on the other occasion I lost the toss. But two things have touched me on weak spots—(1) the "Things" which I have already mentioned, and (2) a combination of chill and tank —to which I am always susceptible. Apart from the latter, I am—and have always considered myself—pretty sound.

Fortunately we are resting in billets: but soon we shall have to go back to the discomfort and monotony. Thanks mainly to our Company Commander—one of the nicest chaps I have ever met, a Fresher in 1913 at Wig's College, Bryson by name—the Company Mess

(which counts for so much) is more or less of a happy family: so that I think I could stick this indefinitely, even if we had some day to "go over the top"—which I am sure is much easier than standing still under shell-fire—and even if I had the chance I don't think I would care to return to England for sickness, or without a medal, or until I have done many more tours in the trenches, or taken part in an offensive. But once I am back honourably in England, and once the tension is relaxed, I shall never want to return to the War. The whole thing is just as unpleasant as I knew it would be.

But with a decent Company Commander one is not unnecessarily worried, and one's spare time (of which there is plenty) is one's own. This means that we can write letters, and keep up the interests of a civilised life. Since I came out here I have read (1) "Crime and Punishment," (2) Hardy's "Return of the Native," (3) Warde Fowler's "Gathering of the Clans," (4) for the first time! "Lorna Doone"—of which nos. 2 and 4 are as fine as any books I have ever come across.

To F. F. Urquhart

April 30, '16.

... In this war there is always the miserable possibility of being cracked like an egg without anything to show for it—alone in a communication-trench or on the road to billets. I suppose—at least I hope—we shall attempt some offensive this summer, but until then one feels very chary of getting laid out.

Meanwhile things are extremely boring—very little that an officer can really do,—and extreme monotony: "the thing which hath been shall be." I am not sure whether one's last state is worse than one's first—one does get used to the initial terrors and discomforts—to some extent, but one also loses the first interest of the thing as an adventure, the state of nervous excitement which lends a piquancy to what is the most ordinary event in the eyes of a veteran. It is remarkable how hardened the old stagers become, so that after a year or more they get caught at last by the most flagrant lack of precautions: the bad thing is that carelessness of death must imply carelessness of life, a brutal sort of condition.

We ourselves have been very lucky so far, and since my first tour in the trenches I have never had even a moderately close shave. But of course you have always to expect an explosion or a whistle over your head.... This weather is simply maddening, the weather which makes one long for a visionary Oxford (I was there exactly a year ago, with my bad arm)—tho' there is this to be said, that in this April sunshine even the trenches are beautiful, and the first green in the squares of the fine old-world town just behind our subsector beguiles with a most plausible suggestion of Oxford. I should like to tell you the name of the town and give you an impression of its considerable charm—my own impressions, for no doubt you have visited the place yourself.

How curious! Just as I write, I find that—for various fortuitous and roundabout reasons—I am detailed to attend a School of Trench Mortars behind the line, so that if one of the Brigade T.M.B. Officers

becomes a casualty, I may be ready to take his place. What a nuisance! I have no desire to leave my Company and my platoon, and am conscious of none of that special aptitude which is necessary for this ticklish and dangerous arm. One of the narrowest escapes I have yet had in the Trenches was when one of our own T. M. bombs burst short just behind the parados, a few yards from me,—the result of some carelessness or inaccuracy which I should be afraid of committing myself. However an order is an order....

So as I and my servant started off, laden with our packs and under a blazing sun upon our ten mile march back from the town referred to, we had the good luck to meet a solitary motor-lorry, driven by a poilu. "Il tombe des obus par ici quelquefois?" I asked with an eastward glance. "Très souvent," he replied, as the great machine bounded over the white pavé road, flanked with broken trees and pitted with shell-holes, while away on the right, for a great open stretch of country, the sun shone on the dazzling chalk of Bosche and Ally lines. The air was full of summer and the sense of a (really) dangerous adventure: buttercups, a shimmer of already thick foliage, old people ploughing perilous fields, and a few miles off, bright in a blue sky, an uplifted monument which marks a region which has been one of the hottest—and will be one of the most "historical"—in all France. At mid-day I was back in our rest-billets, having lunch with the Q.M. and the Transport Officer, till the bus came and took me still further back through miles of beautiful French country, (where on every milestone you see tremendous stirring names) to an

insignificant little village where I am to learn the job of a Pseudo-Artilleryman.

Do please send me a copy of that "Anthologie Catholique" . . .

To his Mother. (*Diary Letter*)

May 6th, 1916.

I promised you a real letter in the note which I sent a day or two days ago, and here goes for a beginning!—but as I cannot remember when I last sent a "real letter" I hardly know where to start. I don't know whether it was from Rest Billets that I wrote to you last, or whether we were in Reserve at . . ., where we were all enjoying life in such delightful billets—the officers of "C" Company in a priest's house,—and where the weather was so nice. But I did tell you how a week ago I was, owing to a variety of "circumstances over which I had no control", ordered to attend this school of trench mortars. Well, the luggage question is much simplified in the Army, and it was not long before my servant had packed up my equipment and his own, and was marching with me down the street and out of the town, under a regular bank holiday sun. The heat simply shimmered off the pavé of the highroad, which led back past a great open landscape—one of the most famous on the Western front—in full view of the German trenches (a mile and a half away)—towards the village, ten miles back, where a motor bus was to conduct me and others to the School of Trench Mortars. We were in luck. Just as we left the town, a French motor-lorry appeared,

and in we jumped. "This road is shelled now and then?" I asked the stolid Gaul who drove me, as the great vehicle bounded over shell holes, and the white chalk from the Hun trenches glistened on a hill away to the right: "Very often!" he answered. Yet you could not but be reassured to see old folk ploughing quietly in the spring fields under the shadow of already leafy trees, regardless of the invader a couple of miles away: and after all, a ride in a motor-lorry even if it may provoke a shell or two, is better than marching ten miles with a pack on, under a May day sun. We did really have to march the last three, my servant and I, but at a most leisurely rate, with a long halt half way in the cool of a delightful wood. The motor bus started hours later, in the afternoon, and I was able to have lunch with some of our officers who happened to be in that village behind the Line. The bus ride was a delightful one, though somewhat dusty, not only through really pleasant country, in real spring weather, but also past milestones inscribed with some of the most famous names in the Western Campaign.

But the most delightful thing of all turned out to be the actual village of our destination, the Headquarters of the T.M. School: a small country village, but full of charm. Here for five days we have been under instruction, having a very easy time indeed, standing about in the warm sun, being lectured, drilling the men occasionally, and watching or supervising the firing of the mortars. I do not suppose you want to hear about the terrific noises we make with our mortars, or how we make them, or what damage we do to the innocent earth: no doubt, it is far more interesting to you, a mother, to know that I have

been enjoying what is virtually a holiday, at the very least a rest, and certainly the pleasantest period of (already) my three months in France.

I have said how nice and quiet the village is, with an old church and an old priest, who heard my Confession this evening and spoke with me afterwards. At the school there are about a dozen officers and seventy or eighty men, sent from each Brigade in two Divisions: and although we meet at haphazard, we find each other sociable and "a jolly lot of fellows, yes we are"—who jog along together in the cheerful, gross and healthily unintellectual manner of the average British officer. I have said that the duties of the School are light and the hours short: our spare time has been largely spent in my favourite game of bridge, of which I was surprised to find myself practically the sole exponent, and of which I constituted myself initiator and instructor: under my tuition the game has flourished greatly of an evening in the farmhouse which serves us for a Mess. Most of the officers have been out here (many of them until lately in the ranks) for a considerable time: so that most of them are quite interesting, and one or two even are moderately intelligent. Of course, we are one and all sick to death of the war: but—in passing—though every officer and man of the millions that are out here shares the same feeling of weariness and disgust, I have known few who did not "make the best of it" and wear a cheerful face, nor have I heard, or seen in letters that I censor, any expression whatever of a desire to end the war till the swine we are fighting have been thoroughly beaten or any doubt that we *shall* beat them, or any shrinking in face of the effort or the length of time

which may be involved in the work. Really the courage of the Average Man is a never-ending marvel to me! And of course one must admire the same spirit in our friends the Enemy.

But to return to the School,—we are all from different Regiments, and we refer to one another by the names of our Regiments: as I say, we like one another, and often I turn round with pleasure when I hear someone cry, "I say, Warwicks"! But it is "here to-day and gone to-morrow"; and Transience is the key-word of the Army.

You may think that we have been having a slack time. Well, I suppose we have. But conditions out here teach one what a good thing in some ways slackness is, and how to appreciate an absolute "dolce far *niente*." However, one thing has kept us at least physically fit, and that is two terrific games of football, played in the evenings after parade, in which the officers captained by "Warwick", have taken on the Instructional Staff of the school. Great games!

What I have appreciated most is our *Huts*. It is possible to be very miserable in a great city, and it is possible to be very happy in a single field,—literally: for I have only once been out of a single field this week, except on duty and for meals,—and that once was to a neighbouring town for "some fun", where I spent a thoroughly dull evening. You see, we live in little canvas huts, rather like bathing boxes, two officers to each hut, pitched along a flowering hedge in a field carpeted with daisies and already sprinkled with buttercups. On every side of the field are the tall thin trees with shapes of perfect gracefulness, for which I believe France is famous: five days ago they were lightly

feathered with a transparent foliage which softened their outlines without hiding them,—to-day they are already becoming dense and losing their individual shapes under the unfolding green. The huts have many little windows as well as their doors, and can be opened out at the sides: so they are always fresh even in this burning weather, and every morning I wake up after a deep slumber unbroken by watches or orders to turn out at 3.30, with a breeze on my cheek, sunshine in my eyes and the sight of the green trees shimmering (as even now they must be in Balliol quad), and in my ears the hum of a yellow bee, or the cropping of the old mare who shares the field with us. Never have I *felt* the spring more: and this is the perfection of the year.

. . . . And to-morrow evening I shall be in the trenches, in the firing line! Still, thanks to the course here I shall have missed three or four days, and before long the whole Battalion will be back again at rest in the village behind the Line. So the routine will continue, until one day we shall " go over the top " . . .

I was annoyed when first I was detailed for this course of instruction, and thought that the trench mortar were a kind of " Suicide Club ", nor did I believe I had enough mechanical aptitude for the work—also there is a sense of responsibility in it, as a mistake may have dreadful results (I myself once had a very narrow escape from one of our own T. M.'s): but now I cannot regret what has given me this jolly week; I have found that the work is very easy; I have developed a certain amount of assurance since I joined the Army: the Mortar in which I have been exercised is a wonderful weapon (indeed if these inventions continue war will

become a farce, the engines of mere mechanical destruction on both sides being so numerous and terrific); and also there are openings in the way of promotion. . . .

At present I am only trained as a reserve officer, ready to be called upon when required: but I am bound to be called upon sooner or later.

Well, I must stop now, because I have also to write to Mary—for her birthday.

To his Sister Mary

May 7. '16.
B.E.F.

I always imagine that Mother sends you my letters, or at least those which make up my "Diary from the Front," and in any case I am sure that such news cannot possibly interest you (*vobis parta quies*—as Aeneas said to his more fortunate friend). So when I write to you, now in your month of May, I can simply keep to the things which are worth talking about, the delightful inconsequentials which filled up our old walks on the Haldons or Woodbury, and which make this special yearly letter always a joy for me to write.

My letters written to Mother will explain to you how it was that on May-day I found myself leaving a town near the firing-line, and walking along accompanied by my servant under Heaven's benediction and a warm sun, through jolly, quiet-looking country ploughed by careless old folk, with only the shell-holes in the road to remind you that the white streaks on the hills a mile and a half away were the front trenches of the German lines. It was all because I happened to have been

detailed for a Course of Instruction in a little village miles behind the line,—instruction in one of the latest inventions of the devil's ingenuity for smashing limbs and scattering the harmless earth. A very easy course with short hours, and lovely weather: a heaven-sent rest from the trenches in the first week of May, which gives time to think the thoughts of early summer, more poignant than ever before in this time and place. Let me try and think them over again for you. For to-day I must rejoin my Battalion in the firing line. "Cras ingens iterabimus aequor": "to-morrow to fresh woods and pastures new." War is a fearfully boring business at the best, a waste of time: but many hours as we waste on duty, there are always many hours with no duties to occupy them, and I am able to keep the spirit in me alive by constant reading. I have read some fine books: a Russian novel full of sordidness and depression, but made sublime by what writers on Russia call the religion of Pity; a splendid Anthology by the Poet Laureate; a most jolly book on Vergil by Warde Fowler, redolent of the Seven Hills; a great classical piece of work called The Return of the Native by Thomas Hardy, a tragedy over which the spirit of the Dorset moorland broods; and last of all a book which I had never undertaken seriously before,—the incomparable Lorna Doone. I hope I may have many years before me to read Lorna again and again. But when I read it out here, you can imagine what I feel—the memories of the country where I made the famous walking-tour, of the Bagworthy stream in which later on a Balliol reading-party bathed, of Porlock where there is the joining of the two counties which are both (if that is possible) all in all to me—Devon and Somerset.

I have just had to break off in order to go to Mass in the village church. I have been able to hear Mass for the last three Sundays,—on Easter Sunday when we were at rest in billets, and last Sunday in —— amid ruins, and with the noise of guns around, in a chapel attended by nuns with great bonnets on their heads like white wings.

However many and hard troubles may be mixed up with life, there are simple things which no-one however unfortunate can be deprived of, things ridiculously simple, like spring and the other seasons, and a little field in spring (such as we have been living in here) surrounded by the tall sinuous trees of northern France and strewn with daisies and the first buttercups. My feeling is that, with all the countless troubles of the world, there is an *inevitable* balance in favour of happiness for anyone who has eyes to see and a heart to feel. And this is borne out (setting aside the fear of death) by the natural and surely not unreasonable desire of men to live. To live, to live. And with all determination to do the will of the Maker, or, as Pagans and Philosophers in their best moments put it, to live in accordance with nature (as Lucretius, Marcus Aurelius, Spinoza, teach), it is difficult for the ordinary man, who tries to make the most of "nature" as he finds it, to understand why life should have been made so naturally and innocently good to live: it is hard for him to understand the perfect happiness of a life "beyond", which is not a repetition or a continuation of the earthly life. Yet he supposes that this cannot be. The second man is of heaven, heavenly: the first man, presumably the "natural man", is of the earth, earthy. So that his earthy interests are doubtless incompatible with the

heavenly,—his love of the hills and the waters (atoms like himself), of the thrill of the spring; his ambitions for the furtherance of earthly causes, be they never so unselfish and humane; his most unselfish loves; his interest, for which he would lay down all else, in family, or school, or city, or country. And even if there be an element of the heavenly and therefore permanent, as there certainly is of the spiritual, in these efforts of his life on the earth, the material and the conditions of his work (apparently essential to the work itself) are bound to disappear. The faces of his friends, the stones of his house or his city, are corruptible. And as for the recompenses of his work here, and the unsought pleasures, *they* seem to him "earthy", of the nature of this particular and finite world. Now you will not convince him that certain natural pleasures are bad, or even that they are not definitely "things good in themselves" (as Plato defines). And though he may agree that a purely spiritual happiness is greater, or perhaps we should say higher, he cannot see that the natural pleasures can be surpassed, or even that there can be anything in the spiritual order at all to *correspond* with them. And if he is right, where is the justification of all these pleasant and good things in the *economy* of the spiritual order? Especially does this question arise in the case of the artist,—who lives in the single and impersonal yearning to *express* beauty, in obedience to a command as urgent, as imperious, and apparently as *spiritual* as any impulse of saint or martyr. Yet *his* impulse is to express beauty in a material, in matter, and he works through *perception*, which is supposed to be unspiritual. Plato has said that the *Philosopher* exercises only that part of himself which is eternal,

so that he can "carry on" with his philosophy in the other life: but he does not prove that the Philosopher is any better fellow than the "healthy natural man" who is worried at losing for ever all the goodness of this life here: and as for the poet, Plato treats him most unfairly—and I venture to say, unphilosophically.

Well, the Artist on his own side (take Vergil as representative) answers with a note of pathetic resignation—"sunt lacrimae rerum". The Philosophers answer finely—"put your trust in nature" but this only raises the same old question. The healthy natural man, of whom the eternal type is Regulus in the Ode of Horace, relies on one infallible resource, which he calls "grit" or "sticking it". But the same apparent lack of economy remains. If you are a sentimentalist, you must be overwhelmed with the sense of pathos; if you are a Philosopher, you tend to do injustice to one half of this life; if you are a plain Stoic, a Regulus, you are acting upon a grand principle, but again a negative and one-sided one, which cannot satisfy reason, much as it exalts the imagination, nor can appeal to the common-sense demand of the ordinary multitude.

Now all these states of mind are unhappy or unsatisfying, and I think always must be—unless and until we take the analogy of human friendship, of those personal relationships which are really the best of the natural or "earthy" good things: for as Shelley says of the human spirit, "it keeps its purest happiest tone for one beloved Friend alone"—if we dwell on this phenomenon, we may find that the best way out of the temptation to pathos or pessimism in regard to the whole order of things, is to bring a personal element into our philosophy or Ethics: and just as one

is best helped in a particular worldly trial by love, confidence, or admiration for some person, so to regard our efforts in life as made to please, and supported by, a person. And so the Incarnation meets at half-way the desire of the natural man, and fulfils his need. Without it there is only the pessimism of the sensualist or the melancholy of the Stoic.

As for those earthly goods—of which the renunciation, however holy, seems a waste—more especially Beauty, which with all due deference to Plato I cannot think of as convertible with or subordinate to Truth, Beauty in which, as Browning says, "you get about the best thing God creates",—there is very little definitely laid down by the Church and the Doctors. I do not know that even St. Augustine says any more than Plato. Yet in the absence of dogma, although the Church is to some degree careless of beauty, and places the state of celibacy and deliberate renunciation on a higher level than wedlock and the full enjoyment of innocent pleasures,—yet for my own part there does seem to be a division in life corresponding to the two things, and both states seem to me equally right and pleasing and meritorious. The artist who "lives laborious days" for the sole expression of beauty in matter—Fra Angelico the painter as opposed to the Dominican—or the man who goes about making others happy and never failing in his duty of happiness, with eyes and heart open to the goodness of the world—seem to realise a divine type for which they were created.

But whereas the wholly spiritual or religious life, renouncing these things, enjoys a good which eternity cannot take away, the artist and the good man of the world stand to lose more, and to feel greater sorrow,

when they must leave this world—"This warm kind world"—"Your chilly heavens I can forego." But even they have consolations of a kind neither selfish nor unspiritual. When the mere sentimentalist sighs at death "d'autres auront nos bois"—for them there is nothing but joy to think that, even when they are gone, the trees will flower and the stream leap carelessly from the mountains, and that there *are others* to enjoy them, and in whose enjoyment there will be something good on earth and rejoicing in heaven. Of a good man killed in battle Vergil says

> "Te nemus Angitiae, liquidâ te Fucinus undâ
> Te liquidi flevere lacus."

That is the voice of a Poet and a Stoic. But the Christian can say: my life passes, but the life of nature is perpetually renewed; do you my friends "carry on" with my work of being happy, and in the thought of you there will still be happiness for me in the grave.

> "Let the blow fall soon or late,
> Let what will be o'er me,
> Give the open heaven above,
> And the road before me."

Crash! I am back in the Trenches and a beautiful thing called an aerial torpedo shatters itself on the roof of my dug-out.

> "Non tamen irritum
> quodcumque retro est efficiet, neque
> diffinget infectumque reddet
> quod fugiens semel hora vexit."

In these words of Horace there is still another consolation—very philosophical—for our "natural man".

It depends upon a great theory all about the memory, which is akin to Art and to Eternity and the Ideas and all sorts of things, suggesting that a thing is made far more real by memory than it was in the mixed and alloyed sensations of experience and a "reality" is eternal ("a joy for ever"). Poetry is emotion *recollected* in tranquillity. Memory is a simplification,—a getting at the essence of a thing. And a man's memories no one can take from him. Rather, in memory, a moment is eternalised, as in art "which bids the foam be fixed upon the river" (Frondes Agrestes). By this simplification we get the best out of life. So here is a motto for us, about which you—a nun—know more than most people: "In tranquillitate et mansuetudine simplifica animam tuam". The best motto that I know.

But this is too complicated and too ambitious to discuss in what I am thinking of as a walk from Teignmouth over the Haldons, in special celebration of your birthday. Let us take breath, sitting down on Telegraph Hill and looking out over the mouth of the Exe—more beautiful by far than the Ostia of Monica and Augustine.

(Here I must break off

(1) that I may catch the post, which I hope will take this letter to you in time for your birthday.

(2) That I may sleep—for I am on duty from 4 till 8 and from 10.30 till 1 a.m., and it is already 3.30. What a life!)

The conclusion of this letter I will post to you tomorrow:[1] send it on please to Mother when you have finished, and ask her to have any part copied out which might interest Br. John or the R's.

[1] The conclusion has not been found.

To his Mother. (*Diary Letter*)

May 12th, 1916,
British Expeditionary Force.

I think you had most of my news from the Trench Mortar School. We had to leave last Sunday to rejoin our Battalions—mine being in the trenches. Motor-buses took us back along the road by which we had come six days before, and dropped us at one of the villages which I have often spoken of behind the line. Here I found myself responsible for ten men and two N.C.O.'s, half of them belonging to another Battalion, with a muddled and unnecessary order to report with them at Brigade H.Q., in the town which I am always referring to. Now an order in the Army carries with it, unless otherwise stated, the implication "as soon as possible": but I waited till the men could get some tea, discovered that there was motor transport going the same way in the evening, and as the distance was some eight miles, decided to make use of it. So at 8 p.m. we boarded a great fleet of motor-lorries and started off. Back to the old game, the dirt and the noise! At the last moment things got muddled up and I was informed that half my men were in another lorry, stopping at a different place. Imagine my annoyance at alighting at . . . , just as a bombardment was taking place, and spending ten minutes of uncertainty till the rest of my men rejoined me. Here I might have sent them straight up to their trenches (it was now 9 p.m.), but orders said that they must go to Brigade H.Q.—a mile away. Needless to say, Brigade knew nothing about us and cared less: so at 10 I was on my way with the men and an obviously

nervous guide on a long and wearisome journey up to the front-line trenches. We learnt from the nervous guide that we had just come in for the tail end of a big bombardment, which we should have walked into if we had not waited behind the line until the evening. As it was, there were a few stray sullen shells dropping round as we filed up an interminable trench. At about 11 p.m. I reached Battalion headquarters—a sand bagged rabbit-warren amid unimaginable ruins: here a chimney representing what was once a farmhouse and here a row of tree stumps representing what was once a street. Needless to say, when I reported to the Adjutant, he said: "Oh, I hoped you would have kept the men back at (the village behind the line) for the night": in answer to which I remarked mentally, "What do you think I wanted to do?" and, openly, flourished my orders in his face. These little things *will* happen even in the best-regulated wars.

Curiously enough, for some days before my return from the School the Huns had been indulging in a considerable bombardment with all sorts of shells, bombs, crumps, Jack Johnsons, whizz bangs, clocks and sausages (the British Soldier has a pet name for them all), but the Battalion had the great good fortune to suffer only ten casualties (mostly with slight wounds); and a very short time after my arrival the excitement ceased, and we ended our tour (for now we are resting again) in uneventful boredom. The night I rejoined the Company, just as I was entering the fire-trench and recognising familiar figures in the gloom, we heard the well-known "Make way—Stretcher", and on my asking who it was, they told me that it was one of the officers of 'C' Company, our little happy family,—only just

wounded a quarter of an hour before, by a horrible thing called an aerial torpedo, and just outside our Company H.Q.,—but fortunately in the back, and slightly, the spine being untouched. I don't think he was in much pain, and his wound is a blighty one—just the wound I am asking for myself if I have to be wounded.

After that, as I say, life was very boring and tiresome indeed, as there were only three of us officers left in all, and there must always be one officer on duty every hour of the day and night. In addition to this there would be work to be done in front of the trenches, under cover of darkness: and an officer had to supervise. Altogether sleep became a luxury, and at the end of the tour I was rather tired out. As a matter of fact the work done at night was rather welcome as providing a little change and excitement. It may either be that a patrol is sent out towards the enemy's wire or his trenches, to listen for his talk and noises, and in the hope of catching a similar patrol of his, or it may be that you need to put up more wire or to do a bit of digging just in front of your own trenches. This work *may* be very dangerous, but if the Huns are unenterprising (as ours were this time) there is nothing much in it. The sentries on each side are listening and peering into the darkness for patrols or working parties; if they seem to see or hear anything, they get the officer on duty to send up a flare, and if their suspicions are confirmed, they fire several rounds or direct a machine gun to fire a burst. Meanwhile the patrol or working party, the moment the flare goes up, fall flat on the ground (into a hole if possible), or stand absolutely still—a rather nervous proceeding,—and wait till all is quiet again. You can tell very quickly whether the

Huns have seen you, or whether they are firing vaguely at a noise: in the first case you have to get back again quickly, in the second you feel merely amused at the waste of ammunition. I was out wiring the other night with four men for about an hour and an half. Everything went smoothly, and I was tempted to go further out on a little expedition of my own,—to destroy a great notice board which the Hun has put out in the No Man's Land, announcing the fall of Kut-el-Amara: but certainly there must have been a machine gun trained on to it, and probably by touching it one would have exploded a bomb,—so it was safer left alone. There were a lot of amusing features about that night, but they are too trivial: I will only say that I quite enjoyed it (and the extra tot of rum) as a contrast to the general boredom and discomfort.

As a matter of fact there is nothing very difficult to put up with in ordinary trench life, except the broken hours of sleep, the difficulties of washing, and the prevalence of smell, flies, rats, and parasites. A bombardment is only occasional, and—thank Heaven!—I do think one gets partly inured to the sense of physical horror which one's first experience of shelling produces. That feeling is largely due to ignorance of the exact power or direction of any particular shell, and is bound to grow less as one has more experience.

We were "relieved" the other day, and came back late at night to our billets very tired and thankful for a bit of a rest. This we are having, for so far the men have had only light fatigues and the officers nothing at all. Two of the officers are on leave, one is away on special duty, one wounded, and only three left. I am now in charge of the Company mess, which is in

a jolly little cottage with plenty of green leaves and cool waters around. Out here one appreciates a homely rough and ready billet, which suggests a picnic, more than a luxurious house, which reminds one too much of home.

By the way, it may interest you to hear that Brigadier-General Seeley, the old Secretary for War, was round here the other day, making himself pleasant all round. He looked a thorough gentleman.

Well, I have no special news, so I must stop. I think I may say that I am now hardened to this life, and suffer only from its monotony and littleness.

To Hubert Secretan

B.E.F.
May 16th.

I wonder when it will be my turn for leave; I have already been out here three months and more, but do not expect to get away for as many months again. No, I have already missed the choicest period of the year in Blighty. Yet from May 1 to 6 I had the good luck to be behind the line, having a very jolly rest in a little village, and being instructed in a species of trench howitzer, for which I am now supposed to be qualified as a reserve officer for the Brigade. This is a great nuisance, for I am very keen on my Battalion, and especially on my company and platoon, but most especially on my Coy. Commander—the Oriel man. He is only twenty-one years old, but most efficient: the idol of officers and men. Bryson is his name, and he took a part (of a slave very scantily clad) in the Acharnians: I

wish we had all known him in the good days, and I hope we may all know him in good days to come. Really there are some awfully good officers here, one of them an old school-friend of mine: the men too are of a distinctly good class, keen, intelligent, and to my mind remarkably good soldiers. How well-bred, non-banausic men can be as brave as they are, and how they can stick what they have to stick (where even officers have a fairly rough time), passes my comprehension. I am very keen altogether on the men, though there is not much that one can do for them, and though their work is largely of a kind in which officers can hardly collaborate: still, I had a most enjoyable time a week ago with four of them, wiring in the No Man's Land, for over an hour and a half.

You do not mind if I just go on chatting to you in this letter, without forethought or sequence: perhaps that is really the best way of conveying the true "atmosphere",—besides, I feel in a chatty mood, being at ease in support billets, with a cigar in my mouth (H. Clay) and in my ears the loud but soothing noise of a heavy strafe which does not immediately affect us:

> Suave . . .
> magnum alterius spectare laborem
>
> — τερπνόν εσθ' ὑπὸ στεγαῖς
> πυκνῆς ἀκούειν ψακάδος, εὐδούσῃ φρενί.

There! that shows what heartless beasts we quickly become out here.

In a very short time I shall be going up to finish my third period in the trenches. In between the periods, and ushered in by a long exhilarating night-march,

with cannonades and rockets away on our flank, we enjoy a bit of rest in reserve billets behind the line (locus refrigerii, lucis et pacis) a place of lighter duties, longer sleep, pyjamas and beds, bridge, football, and all the things which appeal to our now wholly unspiritual tempers. At Oxford we were taught to laugh at a certain "fiction" called The Natural Man: out here he is a gross and palpable reality—material, inchoate, incoherent, disconnected, IL-LOGICAL, but a better man for all that, and a stronger, than ever he was in Blighty. "Warm work! . . . but, mark you, I would not be elsewhere for worlds." I loathe it healthily and heartily, but I am sure it is doing me good.

We happen to be in a not too terrifically lively spot, but of course no place in the line is a health-resort. Curiously enough my most alarming and dangerous experience was on my first morning here and my first entry into "the beaten zone", and my two most unpleasant ones both took place during my first week in trenches. One gets hardened in some degree to the terrors and labours, but on the other hand one loses the sense of freshness and excitement and is tormented by the demon of boredom.

As for the duration of the war, you know much more about the probabilities than I do, but I should like to know what you would feel about it all if you were here. Verbum non amplius!

As for where we are, I cannot give you any details, for that would give away the place at once, and the Huns might learn the exact position of S. H. P. H.

Poor old Master! I feel a strange sense as of a personal loss even now,—a shadow over the sunlight in that beloved quadrangle. The other day I saw among

the killed "2nd Lt. Vincent Hobson"—an Oriel man who used to attend the Master's lectures on Appian, and I remembered the intonation with which the old man used to pronounce that name in his Roll-call. Ah me, the voice is silent, the dust is settling on "The Civil War", and the Pulpit and the desks are empty.

Poor old Hubert! It is poor enough fun out here, but it must be a great deal worse for you—fettered to an office-stool and held back in the leash. And poor old B. It was at Blandford that *I* was from November to February: perhaps I shall return there some day and see him. "The Philosopher, unwilling, we shall constrain to mix in worldly affairs." But perhaps like M. H. C., he too will win a Military Cross some day.

To his Sister Kathleen

May 17, '16.
B.E.F.

I trust you are getting my news, such as it is, from Mother. The worst of it is that in a war like this you do not have dazzling experiences every day, and the melodrama is tedious and long-drawn-out. Of course I am as anxious as you are to see the end of it all and our return: but I must urge you to do as the men do out here, who have a very hard time and have given up a great deal, but do not worry and are wonderfully cheerful. What really annoys me is to miss the advent of summer in England, for I always feel that the loss of a single May at home is a serious loss in one's whole life. However, we shall learn now to enjoy twice as much as before the things that we did not appreciate

as they deserved, and especially the obvious and simple things—like food and sleep and air and cleanliness, the seasons and the flowers, our everyday work, and the simple unaffected intercourse of family and friends. Yes, by Jove, I do feel that the greatest blessing possible is to have a work in life that is congenial and to be able to live for that work alone: and that you are finding that blessing in the orchards at Swanley is my most urgent prayer for you.

To F. F. Urquhart

May 22, '16.

... My journal probably reads very much like Journalism, yet I have only put down exactly what I felt and *everything* that I have felt. You may think the latter impossible: but after all only a fraction of one's time goes to thinking or feeling,—the rest of it being taken up with eating and sleeping and joking and working, or with the deliberate suppression of thought and feeling. I must now own that we have had really an exceptionally quiet time, and also—for even a quiet time is not immune from dangers—exceptional good luck. Time and again we have heard and seen terrific things—but "suave mari magno". All this is bound to come to an end sooner or later, I am afraid. Meanwhile we are very happy in our measure. Our junior officer is away on a course, another is now Divisional Gas-lecturer under the aegis of Harold Hartley, and our Mess-President went down the line the other day with bits of an aerial torpedo (cowardly weapon) in his back: so now I run the Company mess, and

with me there is only our Coy. Commander—the capital Oriel man, who remembers attending your lectures; V. of Magdalen; and a young Wykehamist who was destined for Oriel. Our signalling officer is a most delightful Downside boy called W.: he and the doctor, who are the most human and enlightened members of the H.Q. Company, are always in our mess when they can spare a moment—which we take as a compliment, or rather as a recognition. The whole company is run on the lines of sympathy and common-sense, with a complete and uncommon absence of "STRAFE". So altogether you can imagine how I should dislike having to go away to a Trench Mortar Battery. But I *may* escape that. Again we are on the point of being relieved, and going back for the third time—after a long spell in the neighbourhood of the line—to Divisional Reserve and rest in a village out of harm's way. Nothing can stale the freshness of our delight when rest comes round—the genuine old delight of the schoolboy at end of term.

I am getting quite a connoisseur in the sounds of explosive, and not Pater himself could have found a more "exquisite sensation" than that of distinguishing them, nor Mr. Malthus of the Suicide Club a more exciting thrill than that of dodging aerial torpedoes. I went out on patrol t'other night. Nothing happened...

To Dom Lucius Graham, O.S.B.

May 27. '16.

I have been out here a long time without writing to you, and I can hardly expect you to write to me if I

do not. I know you are always very busy, and I for my part am lazy at correspondence—a thing which is never realized by Br. John, who is indefatigable himself and is always blaming me for my neglect, and thinking that it is due to lack of feeling, whereas the true reason is, in the Head's telegraphic phrase, "probably indolence." I hope you will be able to send me a line, for I do not get much news from Downside, where "all the young men are so *delightfully* busy." As the Higher Certs are impending, I can imagine you getting very busy with the Battle of Homildon Hill, which to some people is so much more important than the struggle for the Vimy Ridge or the Mort Homme. As for war-news I do not know whether my mother has been continuing to send Br. John the instalments of a war-diary which I have been writing, in case the (not very exciting) events of my three and a half months' life out here may be of interest to personal friends. I am very happy to say that, much as I detest everything connected with the war (most of all the monotony of trench life), and though I cannot see—out here—how it will end within twelve months, yet I am thoroughly happy with my fellow-officers and men, that I have so far kept very fit, and that—best of all—I am getting hardened to the worst things that we experience: though there will be very much worse to come. My first trial of fire was under most unpleasant circumstances, where I was alone and had to cycle down a road just in front of a spot where the Huns were dropping shell after shell, but, although I was not unnaturally somewhat disturbed on that occasion, I am glad to say that by now I do not expect to succumb to the

same complaint as one of our mutual military friends! No, I can stand a good deal more of this, and would not wish to return until I have done more than I have done as yet. Though on the other hand, I would not complain at fortune if I got a wound which would bring me back to England before next winter: and I am already getting very exhilarated at the chance of getting seven days' leave (with luck) within a month or two. I have seen pleasant and interesting things in France, and have been lucky in seeing only one casualty: but if ever I let myself think or sentimentalise, the idea of England, and most of all of Downside, is overwhelmingly sweet. If ever I get leave, I shall get my family to stay in Stratton-on-Fosse. . . .

To Charles Robertson

May 27, '16.

Another reason for my general slackness in writing letters (to everybody) is the gradual coarsening of one's feelings, due partly to the sameness of one's experiences, but mainly to the very welcome fact that one is getting hardened, and no longer feels any special excitement in the proximity of High Explosive. This is as it should be, for if one did not quickly lose one's first sensibility one would have to knuckle under and come home. And as for that, none of us would willingly return until we have done a little more than we have done as yet. In fact the general feeling is a desire to do something active, and we all welcome the minor risks of patrol work, etc. as a relief from the monotony of trench routine, which combines passivity

with quite enough dangers of its own. Sooner or later we shall have to enlarge the scale of operations, and then we shall see things different from the present. However I think most of us, and I think I myself, have acquired a sort of resignation and endurance: things do not worry us so much.

But in spite of all this toughening of fibre, certain impressions remain with one—a sunrise when the Huns are quiet, a sunset when they are raising a storm, a night made hideous by some distant cannonades, the nightingales in the warm darkness by a stagnant weedy river, and always the march back from the trenches to reserve-billets in some pretty village full of shady trees.

I am beginning to get very weary indeed of trench-life, and found the only interest in a couple of expeditions into No Man's Land. But during this next tour I have been detailed to understudy the signalling officer, and for that space of time my only duty will be to follow the S.O. about and discover all that is to be known of wires, telephones, terminals and the like. It is a very happy coincidence that the S.O. is an old Downside friend of mine, one of the most delightful officers we have.

Well, I really do not think I have much to add. Leave has been progressing fairly rapidly just of late, and if this continues (though it is unlikely) my turn will come in about six weeks. I should enjoy a week at home just now immensely, but I am quite content here: we are such a happy, cheerful Mess.

I am looking forward to seeing my verses in print.

To Arthur Wiggin

1 June 1916.
B.E.F.

I was sitting up last night, waiting for our O.C. Coy. who happened to be out in No Man's Land. Incidentally he is an Oriel man, but only a Fresher of 1913: he knows you of course, but with him it is a case of "Virgilium *vidi* tantum", as Ovid too said of a famous contemporary. His name is Bryson, and he is one of the best of fellows—a model Coy. Commander. Our second in command is a Wykehamist aged twenty, our full Lieutenant an ex-Magdalen man who specialises in Gilbert and Sullivan, and of "young officers" there is one who met an aerial torpedo and is now in Somerville, another who is at present teaching the Division all about gas, a third new-arrival who rejoices in the name of Dubbs (or if he doesn't the men do) and lastly—the Mess President—your humble. Altogether, you can imagine us as a really contented crew. Personally although I lose for practical purposes all my seniority over many of the officers, and although after four months out here I am not to have leave until all the others, who have been out seven, have had theirs twice.

"tendebantque manus ripae ulterioris amore",

still I am quite happy here, and would not exchange.—Though I may *have* to leave the Battalion any day, having had to study Trench Mortars; meanwhile I have lately been told off to understudy the signalling officer, and am frantically absorbing knowledge of field telephones.

Well, I was sitting up last night, and some perverse impulse kept me from my bed in the doubtful hope of letters arriving before midnight.

Figurez-vous my delight when the post came! Imagine the scene,—the cellar in the ruined village, overgrown with weeds and flowers, the stertorous forms of two officers on paillasses, Bryson just back from a most successful patrol, the rum just arrived, the Q.M.S. explaining the rations, midnight—and the Post.

It's the first letter I have had from you since I got my commission, and that is fourteen and a half months old. One does not talk sentiment in this profession, and—hang it all! you know my methods, Watson, and that I would not talk it if I did want to.... Still it is very true that in this "dissociabile bellum" one gets out of touch with everybody. That is why I was so very glad to get your letter, and am answering it as soon as possible.

Your semi-official communiqué was very arresting, and I woke up the others that they might hear it read. Taking it to mean all that it implies, in what a curious light one sees one's little military efforts: how we seem to be struggling blindly, each Battalion in the Frog and Mice warfare of its own bit of subsector, and each officer intent on his own little effort in the No Man's land. And most important is each little effort in its own sphere, "unrelated to the whole" as the philosophers says: most important, most valuable, most worthy for men to live or to die in. But what of "the whole", and what influence upon it have our little plans and strafes and working-parties—so carefully planned, with so much love and sweat and blood? Fortunately the character of the military life is such

that your path is always straight and plain before you, and a thing is always worth doing, even if it is negligeable to the historian, simply because one has been told to do it. All the same, for those many of us who had thought of life as something very good, and saw work to be done in peace far finer than anything that can be done by fighting—work in which one was bold enough to think that one was fitted to take a humble part—it is a bit hard to enter without a touch of regret into some bloody work, if one is not shown clearly that the war will end, conclusively, by efforts of that kind, by the shedding of blood.

. . . . δὸς δ' ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ἰδέσθαι,
ἐν δὲ φάει καὶ ὅλεσσον . . . .

However I am going out as often as I can when we are next in the Front-line. For the rest, I hope I shall come through it and see you again.

To Mrs. Robertson

B.E.F,
June 2nd 1916.

. . . I regret to say that my chances of leave have evaporated, and it looks as if I must wait another three months or more. However, I do not mind very much: I am happy enough where I am, and well content if my first leave coincides with the end of the War. I have just heard on very good authority that well informed opinion in England has never been so optimistic as it is at this moment; and in spite of the tremendous power which the Huns are showing

all round, even now, the power which one can gauge for one's self in one's own bit of the Line, there are already indications of certain forces working under ground towards the conclusion of it all. And when it is over, what terrible shame and remorse and indignation for the survivors, and for posterity! What a poor show the war has been!—And even granting that a life is well laid down if it contributes to our victory, what a multitude of lives have been simply wasted. And if we feel this, Lord! what must it be for a German who thinks! How can he keep from cursing his own country? In some moods one thinks that this war, which is moving slowly to an end, even when ended will leave a "stain on the imagination" and a scar on the very earth. But at other times it would seem that just as some of our greatest blessings are found in memory, so there is a merciful forgetfulness in human nature, and sorrowful dark passages in life become "old, unhappy, far-off things." The enjoyable things are fortunately permanent, simple, and easy to find. The complications and disorders which we make for ourselves are little things by comparison with—

"La paix de la grande nature."

We are taught laboriously to make sorrows for one another and to tear up and harrass the earth, but after a single spring the traces of the past are overwhelmed by a riot of growth "which labours not", and in their place spring up the poppies of oblivion. The trenches which in February were grim and featureless tunnels of gloom, without colour or form, are already over-arched and embowered with green. You may walk from the ruins of a cottage, half hidden

in springing green, and up to the Front line trenches through a labyrinth of Devonshire lanes. Before the summer comes again children will play between the trenches as in a garden, hide in strange hollows where old fragments of iron peep out from a wilderness of poppies and corn-flowers. Even in the shapeless ruins, where for the moment we are living, you may look up and see a swift dart from a cranny; and all is well.

I have little to tell you in a letter. That is because at present we are not actually in the Front-line trenches, and as the men are always employed in piece-meal fatigues, there is little for us officers to do. In the mornings, as I have been detailed to understudy the signalling officer, I stroll round the trenches with the latter (an old Downside friend) and examine the telephone wires: In the afternoon I watch a small party of men digging, and cutting grass under the shade of beautiful trees. But the greater part of the time goes to eating and sleeping, cards, reading, writing, laughing, talking, and—thinking.

To his Mother

B.E.F. June 6, '16.

It is time I sent you another reassuring bulletin. Situation normal, morale excellent. I did write, did I not? when we were at rest, enjoying inoculation: since then we moved up for quite a nice time (the men not having too much to do) in a ruined village—here a broken plough, there a heap of stones dead as Lot's wife, a trench running under the front gate of some

once well-to-do farmer, a line of battered trees, a field sown with wooden crosses, all with the same date upon them, a church tower, a huge crucifix hanging above a graveyard, and over all an irresistible warmth and flowering, a riot of green and gold and red, poppies, cornflowers, warmth and blue skies. One of the "fatigues" was the cutting of nettles and grass under the shadow of great trees with an officer "supervising": how nice for the meditative officer! Growing blasé to the noise and proximity of bombardments, though some rare spectacles and concerts were performed before us, we slipped into a drowsy and tranquil mood in which quite enough happiness could be found in the thought of always living in the same cellar, washing in the same bucket, sleeping on the same sackcloth in our clothes, playing the same old bridge, smoking the same old briar as the sun set behind ruins and flowers.

But it was an idle and dyspeptic week: since then I find myself with my platoon in sole charge of a redoubt, the rest of the Company being engaged elsewhere,—solely responsible for the food, work, lives of my Thirty, and enjoying myself with vexatious problems on memorandum-forms at the end of a telephone. We had not been in here an hour, when—but that will be a great tale to expand to you when the war is over (which by the way is now expected to happen sooner than people thought) how one had to tackle an impossible situation in the middle of blinding flashes and deafening earthquakes: very interesting in its way.

To his Mother. (*Diary Letter*)

19th June, 1916.

The first great palpable trial is over: I have lost the very natural FEAR which marks one's early days within range of the enemy; I am losing the dread of responsibility, of having to control men and things, of having to *act*; and most remarkable of all, I am beginning to lose the fear of Persons, of Generals, Commanding Officers, and all critical superiors. I feel ten times the man I was. I think I am ten times as fit, and have yet to meet the strain which is too much for me. Not that we have seen the worst yet. But we have seen some new things since I wrote to you last. And yet in spite of it all, one does not get brutalised, over-hardened, or out of touch with the things, the ways of thinking and feeling, for which one valued that old life which seems so far off now, so alien, and so ideal, yet which one remembers without one touch of regret. Of course all this means no more than that I am reaching the state which for the Army is the normal and healthy one: yet that is saying much for one of my temperament, for I am sure that many of my friends feared that it would be otherwise. Again I know that I am sensitive and changeable. Yet if I am really describing what is no more than a mood, it is one which I have felt and tested for some time. I hope it is a final mood. I hope this is my "last word" on the life here. And if it should be in another sense a last word, I want to have said it, to have put on record a testimonial to this great calling. It is a man's life. And though it will always take a great deal of effort for me to imitate the naturally strong man, yet I know

from Father's life and work and adventures in India that it is " in our blood ", and that there is fight in us.

By the way, by a coincidence, I have been told to understudy the signalling officer, which means that I must learn all about telegraphic communications (and incidentally study electricity and magnetism, of which I know nothing): and although one studies many things in the Army which one is never called upon to practise, yet it interests me to find myself looking into the work which Father used to do, sometimes himself in hostile country and in mortal dangers. But of course my regular work is that of leading and controlling my platoon in the trenches and out. This I know to be my proper sphere. I have got to know all my men well. I know that I have authority, and though I could never inspire the affection and devotion which every officer and man in this Company feels for our Commander, Captain Bryson, I do not think I lack their respect. At anyrate I have done all that I can for them. And if anybody orders me off to the Trench Mortars, for which I have been scrappily trained, I shall move heaven and earth to remain an officer of infantry. Life in the Army has taught me what I ought to have known a year ago,—to know my mind and to fight things out. As I say, I want to stay an infantry officer, with my present platoon and my present company. As for Bryson, I regard him as a personal friend, admire him as I have never admired anyone younger than myself, and would do anything for or with him. Our second-in-command too, N., a young Wykehamist, is a thoroughly good fellow; and though the others are not out of the ordinary, yet there is an indefinable 'spirit' about our Mess. There are two things which

sum up for me all the possibilities of happiness—Beauty and Humour: and of the second there is an unbounded store with us. We have dear old C. W. in the Battalion, an honorary member of our Mess, and he of course is a joy for ever: but even without him we are always laughing. We have a joke for every day. With Bryson and N. I have that closest bond of sympathy—the taste for the same humours. And of humours there seems no end. I don't think I have ever seen or appreciated so many quietly funny things as in the four months and a half I have spent "on active service". Naturally there are many in the men's letters which we have to censor: but there they often blend with true pathos, courage and nobility. What a lesson it is to read the thoughts of men, often as refined and sensitive as we have been made by advantages of birth and education, yet living under conditions much harder and disgusting than my own! In the trenches the other day I saw a man with his shirt half off, searching in it—you would soon know why out here—and on his bare chest I caught a glimpse of a red scapular. "You are a Catholic?" I said. "Yes, sir... This is the scapular of the Sacred Heart. My sister has just sent it me." Is there not always something moving, when one sees one's own case reflected in another's? I thought of my own sister at Saffron Walden, and then of the other, whose photo is always in my pack or on my dug-out table. And then there is a case of a Catholic Sergeant, a man fit to rank with Bryson himself. I saw him yesterday striding along with a fixed air down the street of the village where we are again at rest. Half an hour later I met him, alert and cheerful. I told

him he had been recommended for the Military Medal. He told me he had just heard his wife was dying, and that he had gone straight to the Church, from which he was returning.

But of these touches of nobility there are countless examples which I could give you, and of which I long to have a chance of telling you at length and leisure. And how could it be otherwise when there are so many thousands simply living on their courage and manliness? "But what of all these things"—wrote one of them in a letter—"*I volunteered for it*". I seem to see the whole philosophy of Morals and conduct in three words . . .

αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ οἵσω τὸν ἐμὸν πόνον, ὥσπερ ὑπέστην

But it was of the happier side that I was writing, and happiness I find in Beauty and Humour. As a specimen of the little things that amuse us, if you get the Bystander for June 14th and turn to page 477, you will find a list of things on our dug-out table which *we* drew up and sent to the Editor. We could not help laughing ourselves, to look at the mess and confusion, so it may amuse you as well. And then with regard to the other things which one used to enjoy, one can still enjoy them: (1) because one has lost none of the finer tastes of civilisation and (2) because one has lost the uneasiness —so that I found myself at great ease the other day, sitting on sandbags in the sunny corner of a trench, reading a great book of poems that Sligger once gave me, while a most interesting series of aeroplane-fights were being fought overhead. After a while one learns to guess by the sound where a projectile is going to fall, and to divine whether it is a stray or a

forerunner of a crowd. And one does develop a connoisseur's taste for the subtilty and variety of the sounds that were once a terror. When they are near, we take cover: when they are at a distance, it is our amusement to try and imitate their noise.

Then again the other morning as I was strolling back at sunrise from the trenches with two other officers, a stray bullet sighed between my head and the fellow just in front of me, but did not—as it would once have done—make me talk about it for the rest of the day, or even disturb the exquisite pleasure of our walk through a great lush meadow, full of wild flowers and the flicker of lithe and feathery trees,—a scene in which the matins of early birds seemed to be the essential thing, and the mutter of distant guns quite incidental and unreal. I had just had a spell of thirteen days on end in the trenches (having been detailed, as I told you, for a special duty), I had had eight hours' sleep in the previous forty, had been in the open air for the previous twenty, had spent the whole night up and down a trench, keeping out the cold with runs, trying to make up for hunger with tobacco (of which I must have smoked thirty or forty pipes in as many hours), saying my Rosary with what recollection I could: and although my feet (for the first time in my life) were giving me as much as I could bear,—on the whole I never enjoyed a march more, never felt fitter, and never was more ready for a fight.

Speaking of books and reading out here, I have my mind always full of projects and impulses,—poems by the dozen which need only a little effort to write (but that effort is never made), a "psychological novel" about a man who goes through the war, a one-act play

called the Dug-out... But nothing ever gets done, and it is wonderful enough if I get one quarter of my impressions into a letter, and the letter written regularly. One's impressions are a compound of everything that one sees and does for a long time continuously; and a fashionable philosopher has told us that they cannot be divided up or described, that they can only be felt from the inside as a whole. Yet I have all this while been trying to give you the *feeling* of things: perhaps it would have been better to keep to the form of a diary. The experiences are the real thing. And certainly all this is a rare "experience". Although we have not yet had a big smash-up (that will come very soon now, and we shall see as much as ever we want), I feel myself qualified to pronounce that even modern warfare is not devoid of that excitement, and shall I say romance, which is the keenest pleasure in life.

Some three weeks ago I wrote a letter to Mrs Robertson describing at some length a very quiet and delightful period just behind the line: a letter which fills up a gap in the Diary which I keep for you, and which might be inserted in it, if Mrs R. sends you a copy.

After that week the Battalion went a bit further back, but I had to take my platoon to an isolated defensive point. As it happened we had to wait till a bombardment ceased, and no sooner had we occupied our new place than a mine went up, the dug-out rocked, and .... a good many interesting events occurred. Fortunately I had no casualties, but had three men suffering from slight shell-shock. The place I was in had been very much neglected for some time previously, but just then the Brigadier had realised as much, and we had

to put in a great deal of work, being visited daily by the C.O., and more than once by the Brigadier. It was delightful to be in sole charge of the place, living in one end of the same dug-out as my men. The platoon rose to the occasion, we did a great deal of work; and I myself have never been so busy. I was up till after 12 every night but one, and never found a minute to spare from the time I got up in the morning. It was the first opportunity I have had of doing something on my own, and I think it was worth any trouble taken. Yet the nuisance is that I get worried even by affairs which I can manage without difficulty; and with the multitude of little things to be seen to, the separation from my beloved mess, the falling-off of appetite, and the loss of sleep, I was very glad when we rejoined the company in its next tour in the front line.

Well, this *is* a Life! . . . We are due to move again shortly "elsewhere", and I must close this letter in the utmost haste. Let me only tell you that in my last tour in the trenches I had the pleasure of crawling out with Bryson to the German wire one night, a few yards from the German trench, in which I was glad to hear a Hun coughing his heart out and blowing his nose. Since then we have been having some pleasant days of rest, and as I write these lines we are actually on the move.

To Brother John Kane, O.S.B.

B.E.F. June 25. 16.

Thank you kindly for the last letter. It always does me good to hear from you: and as for apologies, I

myself am as much to blame, having frequent opportunities of writing. Indeed I feel that I could rival Cicero in the multitude if not the manner of my correspondence, only I play Bridge, which is the arch-consumer of spare time. Nor have I lost the old habit of reading at every conceivable moment when I ought to be doing other things, and have really covered a lot of various ground,—largely of course in the history of the war and in the general field of military science, which of course involves study of those two all-interesting subjects, organisation and discipline, which are of no less importance to the would-be schoolmaster than to the actual officer. Among the other books that I peruse are things so various as "Practical Electricity and Magnetism" "Jude the Obscure" (interesting), and a noteworthy expression of the Catholic Renaissance in France—"Anthologie de la Poésie Catholique." All these will rest at Downside, I hope, some day. . . .

It was a just thought of yours to send me the verses on "Mendip," which I had myself noted in Punch, but not kept. Of course the appeal of them is direct to one who is now expecting a week's leave very shortly, and thinks of nothing in connection with it but the old Wells road, yet realises that at any moment all may be cut short by a sudden call to do . . . no, I cannot tell you . . . We are no longer in the trenches . . . "Propius jam est quam credidistis."

The thought of revisiting Downside is still like a flame within me. Yet before that consummation I suppose I shall have been through some rough experiences: so far neither danger, novelty, nor discomfort has in any way altered my tastes or my weaknesses.

Let us hope that when I return you will be fit again. "Almae matri redditus uterque."

O Lord! there is such a *Cui Bono?* feeling out here... But that is wrong, for we are now starting to win the war.

To his Sister Kathleen

June 29, 16.

...I am sure my sisters must think they are dreaming when they hear of their warlike brother crawling about in wet mud and barbed wire, with a pistol in one hand, a club studded with nails in the other, and a mask over his "plain though pleasing" face, accompanied by a couple of hardy men, also with clubs and masks, and each carrying two bombs in his pocket,—yes, getting up out of our trench, crawling through our own wire and across the No Man's Land, lying still as a log when a rocket goes up or a bullet sings past, stumbling up against an unexploded shell, kicking a stray tin amid the poppies which clangs like a devil's orchestra, tearing a new pair of puttees in the German wire, and eventually seeing a German sentry, about ten yards away, a dusky outline, and hearing him fire in the wrong direction. Yet this is what I have been doing for the last two nights, an hour and a half each time. I have done four of these patrols in all, and also spent nearly two hours another night putting up wire in front of our trench, with a Hun machine-gun firing from less than 100 yards in front—but they did not exactly locate us in the darkness. It

is a fine life, this, on the whole, and so far well within the limits of endurance. . . .

. . . When I see you next—by Jove, my dear, what a ripping thought!—I shall have some things to talk to you about, and some tales to exaggerate for the young mistresses of Swanley. Yet I know what it will be: when we meet, and you ask "all about it", I shall refuse to talk of anything but the Haldons, the scandal of Exeter, and the gossip of Stratton, or shall burst into "Don't stand a-waiting at the gate" or "Don't put your omberella up"—both of which ditties are by now great favourites with Capt. Bryson. . .

. . . As for the news that really matters to-day, the general news I dare say you see enough in the papers and can put two and two together. But take it from me that we are only just beginning to take the turn of events in this war: that once taken, the end will come quickly, will come this year, with the accompaniment of incidents overwhelming, breathless, beyond any romance, too exciting to believe,—in which Great Britain will play a great and manifold part, and in which even a single person whom you can scarcely imagine in such connections will take his share. "Quorum pars ero." And in such great and unparalleled an achievement we know the vital fact that each of us individuals counts for nothing (I mean our personal safety, not our efforts) and everyone at home must join with us in trying to reconcile ourselves to *any* individual sacrifice, now that our great end seems assured.

To Arthur Wiggin

1 July 1916.
B.E.F.

I must at least acknowledge your very "solid" letter. It sounds quite true; and personally I am now prepared to believe the most optimistic forecasts of the future. The study of this war is of most absorbing interest, and I hope to devote the rest of a long life to it as my principal hobby. To understand it seems to require a knowledge of all history, politics, economics, geography, psychology; and as for the actual experience of living through some of the events, it really does put all one's past into the shade, and satisfies—even with all its grime and dullness and dirty work the elementary sense of adventure and the rest of it. And in all the other respects that matter I am in a very contented mood, the five months of this year in France being so far one of the most satisfying periods of a lifetime, just as the whole of last year was one of the most trying. About the Company Mess and Bryson I need not repeat what I said before—by the way, when I gave your message to dear Bry, he exclaimed, "Why, good Lord! I hardly ever dared to speak to Wiggin." Commendable modesty in one who is admitted to be the best man in the Battalion, as he is certainly the best beloved. I need not repeat what I said to you before. But I am also enjoying the command of my men, for whom I have a great admiration, and whose confidence I am getting to win—after doing four patrols (two on consecutive nights) and wiring for nearly two hours in a line with a Boche Machine Gun. Without these latter opportunities of excitement and exercise trench

warfare would be intolerable—simply by the incubus of inactivity.

But they say, don't they, that all this is going to break up. Well, I think I am now an optimist as regards the final event and its realisation before the winter, just as last year I was an unwilling pessimist. But it seems important that when we do start, there should be no more hitches and indecisive or purely local achievements. If only the Russians can keep up the pace (the Austrians at least cannot stand as much as the Hun), this in combination with what you suggest about the disorganisation of Turkey should produce interesting results out of the Hungary, Roumania, Salonika factors. But I am sure the war will never be really won till *we*, and we alone, do something positive in the West—something worthy of our real strength. And in this effort, greater than anything we have yet attempted I know that this Battalion will soon be taking part: though everything is so indefinite and changeable that to tell you only so much is not "military information."

I am actually, and have been for ten days, next on the list for leave, but I have no thought of that. We are putting our hand to the plough, *μὴ βλέπωμεν ὀπίσω*.

To his Mother

July 8 1916.
B.E.F.

How blind I have been, not to have realised how anxious I have made you by keeping silence for

so many days (I cannot recall when I last wrote to you, or even at what point I left off in the chronicle of my experiences), especially now when there is so much activity on our Front and everyone in England is imagining their special friends as fighting in the very thick of it all. Curiously enough this last week has been about the quietest which I have yet spent with this Battalion in France. Not that we expected quiet. In fact, I think I ended my last letter to you just at a time when we were all full of an enterprise which we were to undertake at any moment (all of us bursting with confidence and satisfaction), an enterprise in which I was to have had the honour of starting the attack with my Platoon, and had actually gone out on two successive nights into No Man's Land to make a "preliminary reconnaissance". But at a quarter of an hour's warning the whole thing was cancelled, and we moved back to this village, which is further from the line than any in which we have stayed since my active-service-days began in earnest. Needless to say we may have to go anywhere at any moment, but although we have been acting strictly on that assumption, sleeping in our clothes and so on, we still find ourselves in the same place at the end of six days. We have not had much to do in the way of parades, our mess is in a comfortable cottage, and the surroundings are quite the prettiest I have found in France. The latter part of the march here was through woods that made each of us think of our native counties: there is certainly a touch of the Devonshire charm in these leafy hills and dales, so unlike the "zone of war", which embraces (approximately) a stretch of the most unlovely county in Europe.

Dear me! I left off writing at this point yesterday evening (Saturday) in order to play Bridge—which we do for many hours every day—relying upon an idle Sunday: but late at night we had orders to go out to-day on to the local range, to do shooting. So here I sit now with this letter on my knee, lazily drowsing through a perfect summer morning, amid the buttercups and poppies, with the quiet sound of bells from the village church, where the white-frocked children of the village are making their First Communion. How calm everything is here! While the "Great Offensive" is moving on, here we are under the shady poplar trees having a real good rest. Yesterday afternoon we actually had a *cricket match*, officers v. men, and although the officers were badly beaten and only made 39 runs in all, I had the pleasure of feeling myself in the old form, and was not-out at the close.

I am well and ready for anything, but anxious to get back again to England, wounded or unwounded, before the summer is quite over. We all expect to win this war now, at any rate before the winter.

To L. A. Toke

July 11, '16.
B.E.F.

... In a way, one has not had enough of novelty in active service to drive one to letter-writing. I remember telling Mrs. Toke at our last meeting that out here my one pleasure (no doubt I said "my one link with the old world") would be the writing of letters to my friends and that I would be far too excited

to read books, which are the great obstacle to letter-writing. But life out here, for us, at any rate, and up till now, has been so *very* prosaic, and such a grim caricature of the daily routine of peace: when one has one's comfortable meals and daily posts even in the trenches, hot baths and an officers' club within a kilometre of the German lines, walks through meadows where the shell-holes of last year are covered with a sea of summer flowers, in which the ruined farm-houses show like battered hulks, and the sole reminder of warfare is the stray bullet that sings past your head. . . . And even that much excitement is lacking in periods like the present, when after three months and a half of quite monotonous trench-life, now just as things are beginning to move, we find ourselves back behind the line, in some sort of "Reserve", waiting for a job which may come at any moment, yet enjoying for ten days already a most idle time in a pretty, unimportant village. I think I told you that my first French village put one in mind of Daubigny: this one suggests a first-class Corot,—is the first bit of country worth looking at that we have seen for quarter of a year, and is not unworthy of Devonshire itself. Here, in the middle of so much stir and glorious possibilities, we are waiting our turn—playing endless Bridge and even *Cricket*! It is strange how, keen as we are upon taking our part in events which we are watching, with the greatest hopes and quite hardened now to "anything in reason" in the way of frightfulness and hate, we are nevertheless overcome by the lotuses of rest and say "we will not wander more". In a few days of sunshine and greenery we become as if we had never endured fire. The pictures that I had of myself out here are not altogether accurate,

For one thing, in the trenches and out,—and at both times we have many opportunities for writing letters and for thinking—, instead of doing either, I find myself simply devouring literature, which I thought I had for the time forsworn. I have read "Le Crime et le Chatiment", "The Babe B.A.", "Tess", "Jude", "The Return of the Native", "Lorna Doone", "The First Seven Divisions", "John Inglesant" . . . and during a couple of days divided between the trenches, the fresh air of fields which were a famous battle-ground of last year, and the primitive comforts of a cellar underneath a ruined farm, I had an immense amount of fun out of "Dorian Gray", and only wished that I could also get hold of "A Rebours"! The contrast between Dorian and my fellow-officers, his talk and ours, his mansion and our dug-out, was delightful: ditto the account of his flirtation with the Church. But I must not be flippant about what is called a masterpiece.

In spite of all this we have not had an uneventful unlaborious time in the past three months, and at any moment now we are ready to enter into something ten times as bad. Fairly narrow escapes, "windy" experiences, patrols to the enemy's wire, wiring-parties in the neighbourhood of Boche machine-guns, are of course part of the routine: in addition to this I have already been on the fringe of one exceptionally fierce bombardment. Leave I have had the ill-luck to miss by a few days. But bother leave and past experiences! We are all anxious to be up and at it now, believing that our lot has been cast into a historic enterprise, which will end in success; thanking our stars that if we fall it will be in something big; and

feeling that the hazards which are a stimulus in the trenches, are a dead-weight on our thought when we are doing nothing; and that we want only one rest, the rest at Home. *Ἴομεν.*

I am afraid I have not written you a "proper letter", but—as people in Irish drama say—have been "only talking". But it is a pleasure only to talk, and I knew that you wanted to hear from me, if only that I am still here and flourishing. . . .

To F. F. Urquhart

July 13, '16.

. . . My heaven, Slig! somebody has just brought in a magazine illustrated with many photographs of Switzerland, and for a whole evening I have recaptured

> "The first virgin passion of a soul
> Communing with the glorious universe."

That is all past. "Toutes ces choses sont passées, comme l'ombre et comme le vent". But one thinks of them now—"comme un dernier rayon, comme un dernier Zephyr raniment la fin d'un beau jour". We are "for it" now at last. Yes, I do think we shall soon be earning either a big head-line or a place in the casualty-list. We may be leaving any moment (we are still in the Corot village) marching or entraining anywhither. But we shall not pass the familiar stations of La Roche, Cluses, Bonneville, Sallanches! Ah, the thought of the Prarion is too impossible for realisation: it would make one burst this human frame with dizzy rapture. But the present is the thing, the great present. We ask nothing better. . . .

To A. W. Pickard-Cambridge

July 16 '16.
B.E.F.

A day or two ago I was writing to Sligger, and remembering how I have neglected to write to you for so long (I cannot remember having even seen you since your illness), I asked him to give you my apologies. But that is not enough. I must send you a letter, however short, without another moment's delay. Without disclosing any military secrets, I may say that we have arrived at a time when anyone who has outstanding debts of letters must settle up, and that at once. We have just marched 45 miles (with all our goods on our backs—*φερέοικοι*) in the last 42 hours. Ça marche!

After five months of active service one hardly knows what to say first in a letter. In the old peace-time letters I always used to tell you what I was reading: well, out here I have "improved my mind" a good deal in the intervals of physical effort and unintellectual activity, and although I have almost forgotten the Classics (except such as are translated in "The Spirit of Man" which I have read many times), I have spent hours of enjoyment under all sorts of conditions with "Crime and Punishment", "The Return of the Native", "Tess", "Jude", and "John Inglesant". No I have forgotten all my Classics, so I cannot talk about them: and it is no use trying to describe my experiences in France, for although they have been of immense interest and value to myself, none so far have been out of the ordinary—considering the circumstances of

the whole thing. But one little event I must give you—

It was in the middle of our long march. Mile after mile along a road stretching forward under a double rank of endless trees. The marching songs had died down, and there was no room in the mind for any feeling but the strain of the burdens and the step. The road rose ahead to climb a hill, the country grew more desolate, and evening came on. Then there was a shout of "Keep to the Right", and a car was seen slowing down as it reached the head of our column. Someone in it was speaking to the Colonel, and a rumour circulated. Who cares if it was wholly true or not? A wave of cheering came down the tired column, stronger and stronger as it reached each platoon. "The French have taken Péronne." For a couple of miles the step went lightly and with songs, for with all our differences we do admire our French Allies: then as darkness and silence fell again I thought of another darker event: *ἑσπέρα μὲν γὰρ ἦν, ἦλθε δ' ἀγγέλων τις ὡς Ἐλατεία κατείληπται.*

But these are greater and more fortunate times. This morning, a Sunday full of sunshine and real rest,—the last rest that we expect for a long time to come—, I strolled into the little garden behind the cottage where the officers of our company are living. There among his lilies, pansies, and carnations, I found an old Senex Corycius, who hailed me to accept a great gift of strawberries, and explained many things—the faults of the French Higher Command, the official neglect of priceless inventions (including one of his own), the defence of Verdun, and—with geographical tracings on the garden path—the stupidity of the German invasion. "Hic

magnus tendebat Achilles"—and so forth. I did not agree with even as much as I understood: but one conviction I found that we shared:

"Nous les aurons."

To Neville Watts

July 18th, '16.
B.E.F.
Circumsonor Armis.

Abs te tam diu nihil literarum?

I did write to you once, but the rest is silence. However—

Nil mihi rescribas: attamen ipse veniam.

But if you will not write to me, you in Blighty to me out here, "caeloque terrae non fueris memor", is it all in vain that I look forward to some of the old walks to the old groves and high places, and old ale at the Old Down Inn? Can a man cut adrift from the past? Is it in vain that for the first time I have read "Lorna" in the trenches, your own Lynmouth copy of Lorna Doone? But how can I hope in any case to see Exmoor or the Mendips ever again: on the eve of . . . ! Exmoor and the Mendips are fabulous, impossible, 'lands undiscoverable in the unheard of West".

No, when we meet again, we shall ask Mrs. Watts to let me come with you to Wessex, shall climb the Beacon or Rainbarrow, thinking of Lear and Wildeve and things older and more solemn than the great advance. But do write.

To his Sister Kathleen

July 18, '16.
B.E.F.

. . . I have *time* for writing to you, my dear, at the moment, but everything else is against it—the spirit in the air, the uncertainty, the to and fro, and the censorship of what we would all like to say. By the way, although the English papers always put things in the wrong proportions, you will gather from them that the war has now entered into a quite new phase—that of our definite ascendency: and that is the true impression, which you get above all things out here, where no one in particular knows anything, but little birds fly about and twitter the truth—Vox populi, vox Dei. There *were* times when the issue of this war seemed doubtful: do you realise what is implied by any doubt on that score? Now it is certain: and, if we have to suffer the heaviest losses, and even have a hard time for the rest of our lives, we should consider ourselves not unlucky.

Poor old Crux is killed—one of my best friends: and Dux is a wounded prisoner in Germany. These are items in the price we have to pay. But we are going to win—win this year: and in any case we have proved our own age equal in heroism and romance to any age in history, by achievements in which our own people, I do really believe,—with all our real faults, and all our imaginary self-criticisms—have played the most wonderful, the decisive part.

To his Sister Mary

July 18 1916.
B.E.F.

Your last letter reached me in a "cover" from Cirencester—letter most loving, most delightful. I am not going to try and answer it in kind or quantity: I shall ramble on (as usual) for a few lines, but it will not be about Exeter, or walking in woods and lanes, about Victor Hugo, or Lorna Doone. I have indeed the time to spare, but it is impossible to write much. We are suspended on the verge of events novel even in this war, and absolutely unheard-of for me: events which will be by far the most striking of my life, which in the mass will be momentous for the world, looming in history, and for the individual will bring one moment of glory, and then—perhaps a bundle of memories which will make the rest of each one's days seem a little thing. Yet you will be amused to hear that our sensations are thoroughly exhilarating—and have nothing in them of stage-fright, of nervousness before a speech, or of that wonderful feeling before the Varsity hockey match, when one desired annihilation of the Ego, wished to lose one's identity in the Absolute, and sickened at the sight even of cold fowl and ham! Mary, "vobis parta quies"—but not the common desire of all of us, even the least spiritual, not the mere happiness of peace and England: but that beatitude (already realised in your life) which we can only pray that we may reach through the ordeal and the fire before us—"which has power to make our noisy years seem moments in the being of the eternal silence".

Suscipiat Dominus sacrificium nostrum. But if we are to be spared, I know one who will give heart-felt thanks for the great gift and blessing of life, which I will enjoy, unchanged, in the same old way, but even more keenly than before. And if anyone asks what is the way, he need only read your letter.

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